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DECEMBER—272

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DEC., 1972
VOL. 32, NO. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

WEEKENDS ARE FOR KILLING

by BRETT HALLIDAY

"The Man With Two Mouths", they called him in the Brotherhood, and when he scowled, a man died. "You're a dead man," he told Mike Shayne. "Play it my way and it won't hurt so much." He grinned, and it was not a pretty thing. "I know how to kill, man. You're next in line!"

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 32, No. 1, December, 1972. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, 90048. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$7.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$14.00 single copies 60¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1972, by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the U.S.A. Postmaster: return address 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90048.

WEEKENDS ARE FOR KILLING

The Man With Two Mouths smiled, and it was not pretty. "You're a dead man, Shayne," he said. "Do like I say and it will be easy. If you don't"—He grinned. "I know how to kill."

THE
NEW COMPLETE
MIKE SHAYNE
SHORT NOVEL

by
**Brett
Halliday**



THEY'VE WRITTEN whole books about the glorious moon over Miami, Florida, and the books don't begin to do it justice.

That's what Mike Shayne was thinking as he looked out over the night-shimmering waters of lower Biscayne Bay from the lounge deck of Eleanor Corbin's Stiltsville weekend retreat. He almost said so to his beautiful secretary, Lucy Hamilton, who sat beside

him, but somehow the night was just too beautiful to spoil with words.

Shayne and Lucy were taking a brief, but long overdue, weekend vacation, and Eleanor had asked them out to share a long, lazy party at her luxurious cottage on the water.

The main room of the house was built on pilings sunk to the reef in the Bay just south of Cape Florida Park on the southern tip of Key Biscayne.



Only a couple of miles away was the closely guarded "Compound" where President Nixon spent so many weekends in conference with the great and the near-great of the world.

South of the Key itself a long line of shoals, reefs and sand flats stretched almost unbroken for miles to the low, wooded Ragged Keys, and separated Biscayne Bay from the deep water running out to

the Gulf Stream and the wide Bahama Banks. There were "lakes" of deeper water in the reefs and shoals; and winding, ever shifting channels to the deeper water. In the Roaring Twenties the liquor smugglers had used these passes in their nefarious trade.

In other spots there were "almost islands" where the reefs and shoals were only a couple of feet under the

surface, only inches at low tide.

Ever since the end of World War Two people had lived—the technical term is squatted—on these banks. The first comers had built crude cabins on stranded hulks of barges and fishing boats. Late comers brought their own aged craft or houseboats and anchored there. The fishing was grand. It was an easy trip up to town for supplies. Best of all there was neither rent nor taxes to pay.

The good news spread. A private club and then a gambling house put elaborate structures on a base of big sand barges. Then the rich got the word. Elaborate weekend homes were put on a platform set on pilings of wood or poured concrete driven in the reef. Nobody was crowded. There was plenty of room for the squatter's shack and the wealthy playboy's game room alike.

The nearest "shacks" to Eleanor Corbin's place where Shayne and Lucy sat in deck chairs that evening were at least a couple of hundred yards away, a distance equal to more than the length of an average city block.

One was out of sight, hidden by the bulk of Eleanor's place. They knew it was there though because a party was going on. A three piece rock combo from

Miami tortured the night with loud cacaphony of sound that not even the distance and the intervening buildings could manage to mute.

Inside the big lounge room at their backs a hi-fi was also playing, but softly, where Eleanor and three other guests were playing bridge.

The other nearby cabin was out towards the sea and silhouetted by a rising moon. At this late hour it was unlit except by the moon and the shimmer from the water. Shayne watched its outline idly as he relaxed.

At least two men came out on the sundeck of the distant cabin as he watched. It was too far for him to see them distinctly but they appeared to be carrying something heavy between them as they moved from the darkened building to the railing.

Lucy Hamilton saw them too.

"What are those men doing, Michael?" she asked idly.

"Getting ready to toss the garbage overboard I guess, Angel," he answered in the same vein.

"Or put the cat out for the night." Lucy Hamilton laughed.

Shayne curiously kept watching.

One of the men on the distant platform went over the

side and down a ladder to water level some eight feet below. It was all in shadow there, but the private detective managed to see that the man was pulling some sort of boat that had been tied under the platform out towards the ladder.

A moment later the man on the platform stooped down and lifted the object they had been carrying. He stood erect, briefly silhouetted against the distant horizon by the moon. Then he hoisted a bulky object and threw it over the rail into the craft below where it landed with a thud clearly audible to the watching Shayne and Lucy.

"My God, Michael," Lucy Hamilton gasped. "Did you see what I think I just saw?"

"I'm afraid I just might have," Shayne said and got swiftly to his feet.

The heavy object thrown down had been briefly clear against the moon. Even at that distance Shayne had known it for the limp body of a dead or unconscious human being. For a second the limp arms had flailed out as the body fell.

Prompted by the sure instinct developed by years at his job, the big private detective ran to the ladder leading down to the small floating raft where Eleanor Corbin's powerboat was moored. Even as he reached the top of the ladder, however,

Mike Shayne realized he was far too late.

The man waiting in the boat near the other Stiltsville cabin had the motor going and was pulling away. His craft was a sleek runabout built for speed, with a powerful engine so beautifully tuned that it made almost no sound in the night. The craft made a quick turn and headed out through the reefs and flats towards the open Atlantic in the East.

The helmsman must have known those waters like the palm of his hand. He kept going fast in spite of frequent twists and turns to keep within a channel which Shayne couldn't even see.

The big redhead realized that even if he had a boat ready to give chase, he'd have gone aground or wrecked his boat long before he could come close to his quarry.

In a matter of minutes the runabout was out of sight to seaward. The cabin from which it had left lay, a dark and silent hulk on the water.

"What on earth was all that about?" Lucy Hamilton asked. She had joined Shayne at the railing.

"I wish I knew," he said.

"Knew what?"

"Knew that it wasn't what I'm positive it was," Shayne told her then. "That wasn't

garbage he was throwing down. It wasn't a couple of buddies going out for a moonlight swim or a bit of early fishing. Somebody was trying to get rid of a body. It might have been a kidnaping or a murder. I don't know. All I do know is it wasn't fun and games. Not the way they threw that body around, it wasn't."

"Can we do anything about it?"

"Not tonight we can't," Shayne said. "Even if I called Will Gentry or the Coast Guard, they couldn't find that little boat tonight."

"It was so peaceful out here," Lucy said.

"I guess we just thought it was, Angel."

In the distance the rock combo still played to an unheeding moon.

II

MIKE SHAYNE made no further effort to follow up on what he'd seen that night. After all he couldn't be absolutely sure it was a body that had been tossed into the boat. At least he couldn't prove it.

In the morning when he woke the first thing he did was look across the water to the neighboring cabin. There were three boats tied up at the foot of the access ladder. One was a

sleek, mahogany and teakwood runabout.

As he watched, Eleanor Corbin came out into the sparkling early morning sunlight and joined him on the deck.

"I didn't know you were as early a riser as I am, Mike," she said when she saw him. "Didn't you rest well last night?"

"Yes I did," Shayne said. "Only one thing. After that band over the way closed down it was just too quiet to suit me. I'm used to downtown traffic for a background noise."

Eleanor laughed. "So you are. And here I was so happy myself when that noise stopped."

"At least your neighbors over there were quiet enough," Shayne said and nodded at the cabin he and Lucy Hamilton had been watching the night before. "I didn't hear a peep out of them."

Eleanor Corbin followed his gaze.

"That's funny," she said. "Most weekends they're going over there till dawn. When Charlie has one of his poker parties you can't get him away from the table and he likes a noisy crowd for background. Come to think of it, they were quiet last week too."

"Who is Charlie?"

"Oh," she said then, "I forgot this was your first time

out here and you don't know anybody. That's Charlie and Sally Conquest's place. I mean I suppose I should say Sally's. It was hers before she married Charlie. I mean all the money is Sally's in case you hadn't heard."



"I'd heard that," Shayne said. "Everybody in Miami knows Charlie Conquest, or at least who he is. A real high-binder and a real fool with the cards. Every dime he ever had of his own he's gambled away one way or the other. I guess I hadn't heard he married into the big money though."

"Oh yes. About a year ago," Eleanor said. "Sally's just a wonderful girl, too. I'm sure your Lucy would like her a lot. Tell you what. After breakfast let's take a boat over and see that they meet."

"It sounds great," Shayne said.

"Fine. That's what we'll do then—at least as soon as I'm sure they're up and around over there."

As it turned out it was nearly noon before Mike Shayne and Lucy Hamilton and their hostess took an outboard skiff over to the Conquest's Stiltsville cottage. By that time Eleanor had spotted Sally Conquest moving about on the sun deck.

Sally greeted them as they

climbed up the ladder, but to Shayne at least it seemed far from an enthusiastic welcome. The beautiful blonde Mrs. Conquest seemed distraught and exhausted. There were dark circles under her lovely eyes.

Another couple were on the sundeck with her and were introduced as "our guests" with a vague wave of the hand. They looked back at the newcomers without enthusiasm.

Shayne recognized the couple as a race track character named Banner and his wife. They were hardly the sort of people he had expected to find in this setting.

They weren't the sort who would be capable of a murder either—if that was what he'd seen the night before. The Banners of South Florida are con men, not muscle boys.

They could roll a helpless drunk but very little more.

Eleanor, Sally and Lucy were talking together so Shayne decided to look around a bit more. He stepped out of the glaring sun into the big living-dining area of the cabin. The room was in some disarray, with ash trays full of butts and unwashed plates and liquor glasses on the tables. Open windows let the sea breeze in, but the place still had a rank and musty odor.

Over in one corner of the room four men were clustered about a poker table. Shayne recognized the one facing him as Charlie Conquest. By the looks of Charlie the game must have been going on all night, maybe for days.

The two men in profile to Shayne were rough looking characters. He didn't recognize the faces but the types were as familiar in the shady hangouts of Miami as palm trees and hibiscus flowers in the yards.

One of the men had a bright lemon yellow silk shirt. From his sallow face and black sideburns he could be a Latino. The other was a bald, battle scarred Irishman with New York stamped all over his features.

The fourth man had his back to the big detective. He didn't notice who had come in at first.

Then Charlie Conquest looked up and recognized the newcomer. He dropped his hand of cards.

"My God," he said to his friends, "it's Mike Shayne. What the devil are you doing here, Mike?"

The redhead hadn't a chance to answer because that was when the action exploded.

The fourth man at the table twisted round without even getting up from the chair. He kept his head down, reached back and pulled the chair out from under him with his right hand. That left him in a stooped over, bent-legged crouch with his head still down and bracing himself with his left hand to the floor.

He yelled some words in a language Shayne assumed was Spanish—he couldn't make them out—and then hurled the chair he'd been sitting on across the floor.

Then he launched himself in a scrambling run for the door like a racer from a crouching start.

Purely by instinct Mike Shayne jumped to intercept the runner. The chair took him below the knees and the legs and rungs tangled his feet and tripped him. Shayne hit the floor with his left shoulder, rolling to brake the impact.

It was a jarring fall and half

knocked the wind out of him. Before he could recover the card player flashed by him on his way to the door. He had his head averted and shielded his face with one hand.

All the big man on the floor could make out was a section of unshaven, blue jowled jaw and neck traversed by the livid, twisting line of an old knife scar.

Shayne started to get up just as the running man made it to the door.

That's when the Irish hood made a diving football tackle across the floor, wound both arms around Shayne's ankles and brought him down again hard onto the floor.

Shayne twisted like an eel. His fighting blood was up now and he got the tackler by the throat. The big detective's hands found the right judo pressure point behind the man's ear and his attacker suddenly lost all interest in further combat.

Shayne let go when he saw lemon-shirt coming at him on the run. The swarthy man had a switchblade stiletto with a six inch blade in his hand and his face showed every intention of using it.

Mike Shayne didn't carry a gun on Sunday morning social calls. He felt very naked and alone down there on the floor,

but instincts bred of long years of rough and tumble encounters came to his rescue now.

He twisted on his hip, braced against the floor with his big hands and kicked the charging Latino's feet out from under him. It was the one thing the knife fighter apparently wasn't expecting. He fell forward and as he did Mike Shayne hit him a full armed right handed wallop that could have broken the neck of a lesser man.

Lemon-shirt saw it coming and twisted like a cat in the air. It dulled the impact of the blow, but it was hard enough anyway so that he dropped the knife in mid air and landed on the floor dazed and only barely conscious.

Charlie Conquest was on his feet by then, looking scared and yelling: "Stop it. Stop I say." Nobody was listening to him.

Mike Shayne got up off the floor and picked up the stiletto. He closed the blade and put the deadly thing in his pocket.

"You should go to church on Sunday mornings," he said to his host. "It'd keep you in better company, Charlie."

III

BEFORE CONQUEST had a chance to answer his wife and Lucy Hamilton came hastily in from the sundeck and stopped

with amazed expressions when they saw the two men still prostrate on the flooring.

Lucy Hamilton moved swiftly to Mike Shayne's side.

"Are you all right, Michael?"

"What on earth is going on here?" Sally Conquest demanded. "I don't understand this at all, Charlie. I've told you—"

"Nothing," Charles Conquest interrupted hastily. "Nothing at all really. I mean the boys misunderstood when Mike came in. They didn't know he was around any more than I did. There's big money in these games."

He gestured at the card table where there were indeed stacks of greenbacks and silver.

"Coming in like that," he went on, "Mike could have been anybody. There was a scuffle. Before I could stop it, that is. You can see Mike was able to take care of himself."

"That's ridiculous," Lucy Hamilton said hotly. "Michael doesn't look like a hold up man. Besides, you knew him."

It was indeed a pretty thin excuse for a "scuffle" that had left two thugs semi-conscious on the floor, but Shayne had his own reasons for wanting to go along with it at that point.

"I guess that's about the long and short of it," he said. "These boys had been playing and drinking all night I'm sure

I can understand them making a mistake. Besides there wasn't any real harm done. Like Charlie said I was able to take care of myself."

He didn't mention the murderous switchblade knife that was weighing down his pocket at that very moment. Neither did any of the others.

"Are you sure you're okay, Michael?" Lucy asked.

"I'm all right," Shayne said.

"But what was the matter with Mr. Simmons?" Sally Conquest asked her husband. "He came running out of here like the house was on fire. Before we could stop him he was down the ladder and starting up the runabout. Why, he must be half way back to the Miami Marina by now."

"I guess he must have really thought it was a heist," Shayne said. "At least, he took off like that."

"Like a scalded tomcat," Lucy Hamilton said.

"Which way did he go, out to sea or by the bay?" the big detective asked.

"By the Bay of course," Sally Conquest said. "The closest pass you can get a boat over the flats to deep water is right at Cape Florida and that's nearly a mile north of here."

Shayne was silent. The night before he'd seen somebody take that same runabout or its twin

right out to sea by a winding channel that must begin close to this place. He was surprised that Sally didn't know about that pass, but she certainly sounded sincere when she spoke. Besides Sally probably wasn't an experienced boatman. She and her sort used these Stiltsville cabins for weekend partying and little else.

The redhead also had a fair idea who "Mr. Simmons" might be. The name hadn't come to him yet, but Mike Shayne had seen that scar, or its twin, someplace before. After a while the photographic memory he'd developed over the years as a part of his trade would put a mental two and two together and he'd recollect the rest of the man's features. Then the name would come to him.

Certainly something had happened here in this luxurious weekend camp a good deal more important to the men around that poker table than the fear of being held up for the game stakes.

Something was going on that was important enough to make lemon-shirt use a knife and to keep it concealed. A few dollars in poker winnings still weren't that important.

"What was the matter with that guy?" Shayne asked Conquest.

Conquest was beginning to



recover his self possession by now. "How do I know? My God, Shayne, you were right here. He just jumped up and ran out of here as soon as I called your name. What's between you two guys anyway?"

"Nothing I know about," Shayne said. "I didn't even get a good look at him what with your buddies here jumping me. Who is he anyway?"

"I don't really know. Just a card player." Charlie Conquest was on the defensive again. The two goons were up off the floor by now; standing, watching and listening. Latino looked like he wished he had his knife back, and the other was rubbing his

neck and glaring at the big detective.

"He just came out for the poker game," Conquest said again. "He said his name was Simmons. That's all I know except he was winning over two thousand dollars when you came in."

If he was afraid of being robbed, Shayne thought to himself, why did he run off and leave all that money on the table? The man had something hotter than his winnings on his mind all right.

"I must say I don't understand any of this," Sally Conquest said heatedly. "In the future, Charles, you should be more careful whom you ask out here on weekends. I'd never forgive you if Mike or Lucy had been hurt. That Simmons, or whoever he is, is decidedly not welcome here in the future."

"It's not that bad, Sally," Shayne said. "You can see I haven't been hurt. Actually there's no real harm done. Let's go back outside and let these boys finish their game."

He didn't want to force the issue any further right then. Actually he hadn't anything to go on except guesses. He thought he'd seen a body taken from this place the night before. It could have been somebody had taken a drunk home. A man had run away

rather than face him, but that proved nothing by itself. Besides he wasn't even working on a case at this point.

He wanted time to think.

"Let them finish their game," Shayne said.

Back on the sundeck Sally Conquest apologized again to Shayne, Lucy Hamilton, and to Eleanor Corbin, who had remained outside in a lounge chair.

"Sometimes I just can't understand Charlie. The people he brings out here for those card games of his. Some of them are absolutely awful."

"No harm done, dear," Lucy Hamilton assured her, "and I'm certain none of us blame you in the least. We'll run along now and forget all about it."

At the head of the ladder down to the boats Sally Conquest put her hand on Shayne's arm. "You'll be at Eleanor's all day? Good. I want to come over and talk to you later on."

Mike Shayne nodded. "I think that might be a good idea. Come any time you can."

Back at Eleanor Corbin's luxurious weekend retreat Shayne and Lucy Hamilton put on their bathing suits and joined her other guests in a swim off the raft moored to the pilings where the boats tied up. At this spot the water was

about eight feet deep and kept clean by the tidal currents. It was clear and cool and refreshing in the heat of the day.

They could look down and see snapper, angel fish, moonfish and other tropical exotics clustered about the pilings in the shade under the building. The fish didn't seem at all scared of the human swimmers.

"What really happened over there?" Lucy Hamilton asked when she and Shayne were alone.

"I'm not really sure, Angel," he told her. "I guess Sally will tell me more about it when she comes over. All I know now is that that husband of hers has some rough playmates."

"Poor Sally," Lucy said. "She's really very nice. But that Charlie. I don't see how she stands him."

After the swim they were served a delicious buffet lunch on the sundeck. The food was served by Eleanor's servants, but most of it had been brought out from town by one of the best of the hotel catering firms.

"I never did like to cook," Eleanor explained. "When Sam was alive I cooked for him sometimes because it pleased him. But now, who wants to bother? It's easier and nicer this way."

Most of the guests either

retired for an afternoon nap or sat at the bridge tables in the living room. Lucy Hamilton joined one of the latter groups.

Mike Shayne stood at the sundeck railing looking north across the Bay to where the newly restored Cape Florida light stood like a tower against a dazzling blue sky flecked with white clouds.

He wanted Sally Conquest to be able to look across the water and see that he was there and alone.

It wasn't long before he saw her leave the Conquest cabin and start over in an outboard skiff.

When her boat reached the Corbin landing raft Sally Conquest didn't climb out. She saw Mike Shayne leaning on the rail above and beckoned to him to come down. Shayne got the point at once and climbed down the ladder.

"Come take a ride with me, Mr. Shayne," Sally Conquest said in a low voice. "I've got something terribly important to talk to you about, and it's the only way I can be absolutely sure that we aren't overheard."

When he was seated ahead of her in the sixteen foot lap-strake skiff, she kept the powerful outboard motor throttled down to a purr and swung away in a long smooth

curve northward towards Key

Biscayne. The water was smooth and she kept up just enough speed so the wind of their motion cooled them both and they could talk easily.

"I'm going to assume that you realized this morning there is something terribly wrong at my home," she said and paused to watch his reaction.

Mike Shayne liked the simple and honest directness of the statement and the long level gaze she gave him from surprisingly vital brown eyes. Sally Conquest was not a young woman, probably in her early fifties, but she was still beautiful with a grace and inner fire that owed nothing to the efforts of her high priced beauty consultants. She was a poised, intelligent, vital woman. It was a type that the big detective had always admired.

Now he could see that there was a deep trouble inside her and that her apparently easy self control was maintained only at the cost of great effort.

"It wasn't any of my business really, Mrs. Conquest," he said then. "At least not until and unless you want to make it so by confiding in me. You don't have to do that, you know. I'm not actually a policeman."

"I know that," she said, "If you were I probably wouldn't have come to talk to you."

Incidentally, call me Sally. A friend of Eleanor's is my friend. Besides I'm going to have to confide a great deal in you. That means we'll have to be friends and trust each other."

"Okay, Sally," the detective said. "That sounds just about right to me too. So suppose you start at the beginning and tell me what's wrong. Don't leave anything out."

"I'm going to have to start with my brother Rick," she said. "Richard Lander. You may have heard of him. Maybe you even know him."

"Heard of him," Shayne admitted. "I never met him."

He knew of Rick Lander, as he'd heard of most people of any prominence in the South Florida Gold Coast area, but only as an amiable, rather reckless playboy type.

"What about your brother?" he asked.

"He's gone," she said. "Missing. Last evening he ate dinner with me at the cabin. The rest of them were still at the card table. I took plates in to them and Rick and I ate alone out on the deck. This morning he wasn't there."

"Didn't he say goodbye to you or leave a message?"

"That's it. They say he left a message. At least Charlie said he did, but I don't know quite what to believe. I went to bed,

and Rick said he was too. His bed had been slept in.

"Then this morning Charlie said Rick got up and said he had to take an early flight to New York. He said it was something he'd remembered that was terribly important. He had to go right away. One of the men took him to Miami by boat and he got a plane from there to New York."

Shayne remembered watching the runabout pull away the night before. There had been two men in the craft, but one of them hadn't climbed down the ladder. He'd been thrown into the boat with his arms pinwheeling out against the moonlit water. Had that flying body been Richard Lander?

He decided not to tell Sally Conquest about that as yet. Aloud, he said only: "Which of them took him to town? Did you talk to that man?"

"That's the funny part. It was the one they call Simmons. The man who ran away this morning when he saw you."

Shayne wasn't surprised. "What did he say about it?"

"He was sort of curt about it, Mike, as if he didn't want to be bothered. He said he took Rick to the docks at the Dinner Key Marina, where the City Hall is, and landed him there. There's a public phone booth on the landing stage, and Rick

said he'd call a cab from there and have it take him out to the airport."

"I can check on that for you if you want me to," Mike Shayne said. "The cab companies keep records of the runs their men make. Anything that late at night should be easy to trace."

"You won't have to," Sally Conquest told him. "I thought of that. I called the airport myself this morning. We have a phone at the cabin. I know which line Rick usually flies. They have a record of a ticket sold in his name last night. A man who said he was Rick took the four A.M. flight to La Guardia last night."

The skiff was nearing the beach at the tip of Cape Florida Park. They could hear the laughter and shouts of weekend swimmers in the surf.

"Why did you phrase it that way?" Shayne asked.

"What way?"

"You said; 'a man who said he was Rick'. Aren't you sure it was your brother who took the plane?"

"Now that you mention it, Mike, I'm really not sure. I guess that's why I said that. The clerk who sold the ticket wasn't still on duty of course. The ticket was paid for with one of Rick's credit cards. They did have a record of that as well as

the name entered on the passenger list. Still, it isn't like Rick to go off in the middle of the night like that. If there was something that important, he'd have woken me up to tell me, or told me earlier in the evening."

"I'd think so, Sally," Shayne said.

"I knew you would," she said. "Mike, you're a private detective. I want to hire you to find Rick. I want you to find out what has been going on with Charlie and those awful friends of his. I want you to find out everything."

IV

BIG MIKE SHAYNE looked at Sally Conquest. Despite the calm and assured manner with which she held the steering tiller of the motor and controlled the skiff there was an element of deep appeal in those brown eyes. They voiced a mute "please" which he felt her lips would have been too proud to utter.

"All right, Sally," he said. "I'll take your case. But only if you understand that I handle it as a professional. Just the way I would any other case that came into my office."

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean," she said, and

continued to look directly at him.

"I think you do," Shayne said. "I think you thought it out before you decided to hire me, but I'll spell it out for you anyway. I'll find your brother no matter where he is or what happened to put him there. You wouldn't hire me unless you thought there was something very wrong. There may have been foul play last night."

Shayne paused to see how she took it.

She just said: "Go on. Say it all. Finish up what you want to say, Mike."

"If there was foul play," he said, "your husband Charlie could be mixed up in it. At least he'd almost have to know about it. If I find trouble, and I find Charlie is part of it, I can't cover up for him. He'll have to take his lumps like anybody else. When I'm hired to do a job I don't stop halfway. I go all the way before I stop. I finish the job."

"I know," she said. "I thought about that before I decided to ask you. You finish this job. I'll back you all the way."

He liked the way she said it and the way she suddenly stretched out her hand for him to shake and seal the bargain.

Shayne said; "Okay. Then let's get on back to Stiltsville. If



those boys are still playing poker, I'd better have a talk with them. The sooner the better."

It didn't work out quite that way.

The skiff had barely begun the long run back to the Conquest weekend cabin when they saw another boat coming up the Bay towards them. It was a powerful runabout and coming fast with a flat wake and wide V-mound of foam under the sharp bow.

"That looks like my boat," Sally Conquest said.

The runabout kept coming. Whoever drove her must have had the throttle open wide by the way she ate up the distance.

At first the detective wondered if the fast boat would

ignore them, but the steersman swung over in an easy curve to pass only fifty yards away.

Shayne could see that the big Irish poker player was at the wheel. He rode that boat like a jockey taking a winner in that last run for the wire. He didn't even look at them.

Charlie Conquest and lemon-shirt were on the wide seat at the rear of the boat. When they came close Charlie waved to his wife and Mike Shayne. Conquest's face was set and expressionless the way it was when he looked at a poker hand. The wave was casual and friendly, but Conquest's face wasn't.

Lemon-shirt didn't wave. He didn't even look their way. His dark face watched Charlie Conquest. He had one hand down and close to Charlie's kidney. There was something in the hand that caught the sunlight and glinted briefly.

Then the boat straightened out and was gone up the Bay towards the City of Miami.

"Mike," Sally Conquest said. "That man had a gun. He was holding a gun on my Charlie."

"I know," Shayne said. "I saw the gun too."

"Aren't you going to go after them?"

"In this skiff?" Shayne asked. "It would be like chasing a racing car with a bicycle.

Besides it could be dangerous. I thought for a minute he was going to run us down and try to kill us with that thing while he had the chance. I guess it was the people watching from the Beach stopped him."

"For a moment I thought you'd make an attempt to stop them."

"I'll take any calculated risk," Shayne said. "But they had a gun on your husband, and might have used it on him or us. It wouldn't prove a thing for us to commit suicide. Do you have a phone in that cottage of yours?"

"Yes," Sally said. "Ship to shore type."

"Get me there as fast as you can. I'll call the Miami police from there. If there's a helicopter in the air, they may be able to spot where that boat puts in."

Sally Conquest opened up the outboard as wide as it would go and the skiff began to build a bow wave of its own.

"They may have smashed the phone," she said.

"Maybe," Mike Shayne agreed. "Maybe not. That sort isn't heavy on brains. We have to take the chance."

Back at the Conquest landing she would have gone first up the ladder, but Shayne made her let him go first. He wanted to be sure Simmons hadn't

come back while they were gone.

He found the sun deck and living room empty. She joined him and showed him the phone.

It was sitting on a large sheet of yellow lined pad paper on which somebody had written them a note. It said:

If you or the shamus call the fuzz, we'll cut Charlie up for fish bait before they get to us. Just wait for this phone to ring.

"It means don't call us," Shayne said. "We'll call you."

V

"WHAT ARE we going to do now?" Sally Conquest asked.

"I think all we can do is to wait till that phone rings," Mike Shayne told her. "We won't know what they want or what they're really up to until they do call and open up to us. Till that happens we won't really know where to begin."

"I suppose it wouldn't do any good to call in the police?" she asked.

"When the right time comes, that's exactly what I am going to do," Shayne said. "Will Gentry's boys can cover this place like a blanket, which no one man can do. This isn't the right time though. Whoever they are, they still have your husband. Besides we don't

really know yet who or what to look for."

"No," she said. "We don't, do we?"

"I'm hoping we can help out there," the detective said. "Who are these men anyway, and what do you know about them? Have they been out here before or to your home in town? Are they business associates of your husband? Tell me everything you can remember about them."

"I'll try," Sally Conquest said. "Actually I don't think I know much that can help you though. Ever since we were married two years ago Charlie has been bringing odd people home with him. You wouldn't believe what some of them were like, especially the women they brought with them."

"Charlie's a gambler. He gambles all the time. That's what he and these people did. That's who they are. After a while I stopped even trying to remember their names. Of course our old friends, mine and my first husband's, didn't fit in any more. The last few months I've felt like a stranger in my own home. It hasn't been easy."

"I'm sure it hasn't," Shayne said. "Now, how about these three—had they been here before?"

"Only one of them," she

said. "That's the man they called Simmons. You're right, you know. I never really thought that was his right name. It didn't fit somehow. He was here two or three times before. He brought the other two with him this weekend. I don't think I've seen either of them before. I can't be absolutely positive about that though. They come and go."

"What about this Simmons?"

"Well, I noticed him because he seemed to be a cut above the rest of them. I don't mean nicer. Nothing like that. He acted like a leader. The rest of them deferred to him. I got the impression even Charlie—I don't know."

"One more thing. The name Simmons wasn't right for him, if you know what I mean. That man had a trace of accent. He should have had a foreign name to go with it. That and the scar. He was sinister."

The phone on the table suddenly rang.

Sally Conquest went over to answer it.

"There's an extension." She pointed to a door which proved to lead into the master bedroom.

Shayne got to the extension phone in time to hear her pick up the instrument in the main

"This is Mrs. Conquest," he heard her say.

"It had better be." The voice was a man's. It was a hard, commanding voice with a trace of an accent that Mike Shayne couldn't quite trace. The speaker sounded very sure of himself.

"I said I'm Mrs. Conquest," Sally said.

"All right," the voice said. "Now you listen and listen close to what I've got to say. We have Charlie here with us. I guess you figured that out already."

Mike Shayne admired the simple directness with which Sally Conquest answered that statement. She didn't mince words or beat about the bush.

"How much do you want for him?"

There was a moment's silence at the other end of the wire, and then: "You get right to the point," the voice said. "I like that. Most women would do some crying first."

"What's your price?" Sally Conquest asked again.

"Oh, we've a price all right," he answered. "We have a price for Charlie. Only it isn't exactly the sort of price you might maybe expect. This time it won't cost you money."

"What?" Sally was obviously as startled by that as the listening detective himself.

"What do you mean that the price isn't money?"

"Just what I said. Not money. What you and Charlie both pay to get him back all sound and healthy is something else. What I want is cooperation. Do you understand? The pair of you just cooperate and do like I say for a few days, and everything will come out all right."

"I hear what you say," Sally said to the man. "I just don't understand what you mean by cooperation. What are we supposed to do?"

When the man spoke again his tone had changed. It was grim and imperative now. He was sure of himself and sounded as if he would brook no opposition.

"What you do is exactly what I tell you to do," he said. "You don't ask any more questions. You don't stop to think about anything. You just do as you're told. So does Charlie. Anything else and we kill Charlie. Also, we kill you. Do you understand that?"

"I hear you," she said, "but I must ask you one question. Where is my brother? What did you do to Rick?"

"We didn't do anything to your brother," the voice said. "He took a plane to someplace. Now, are you going to cooperate or do we kill Charlie

boy right now and throw him in the swamp?"

A new voice came on the line. It was Charlie Conquest and he sounded in a regular blue funk. "For God's sake Sally, do as he says. He means it."

The hard voice spoke again. "Well?"

"I'll cooperate," Sally Conquest said. "What do you want me to do?"

"First of all you get rid of Mike Shayne. I suppose he is on the extension phone right now. Hello, shamus. Well, get him off that place. Tell him not to call his pals on the cops. No police or you and Charlie get it right through the head. Shayne gets out of there and stays out. You understand?"

Sally said: "I understand."

"Then you sit tight and get ready for company. You're going to have more weekend guests. We'll maybe bring Charlie with us. Maybe not. You just get ready for guests."

"You bring Charles so I can know he's alive," she said.

The voice laughed. "I said no more questions out of you," it said. "You just get the shamus out of there and sit tight. That's all."

The line went dead as the man broke the connection at his end.

Shayne went back to the shore. Your bedroom faces



living room. A white faced and determined Sally Conquest poured them each a drink from the bar in one corner. They took them down at a gulp.

"For God's sake, Mike," she said then. "What that all about?"

"I don't know," the big man said. "It's not the usual sort of kidnaping for certain. I think you have to go along with them for now though. Have you got a gun here?"

Sally went into the bedroom and came back with a shiny blue steel detective special thirty eight and a box of shells. "I got it for Charlie. He's scared of guns though."

Shayne took the weapon. "I'll keep this. My guns are on

Eleanor's place. I'll go back there. If you need help in a hurry you hang a towel, a slip, anything white out the bedroom window. I'll see it."

"Do you have to go?"

"They'll have somebody watching right now with binoculars to see that I do. I'll come back after dark."

Sally got a key and gave it to him. "The gas tanks for heating and cooking, water storage, those things are under this building in a sort of cellar room built above the water. There's a short ladder and a door for access, then a trap door up to the kitchen. This key opens the door. I don't think Simmons knows about it."

"That solves a lot of things," Shayne said. "I'll be back tonight."

VI

SALLY CONQUEST took Mike Shayne back to Eleanor Corbin's boat landing in the skiff. She was white faced and fighting hard to maintain her self-control and composure.

"Don't worry too much right now," Shayne told her. "They won't do anything till late tonight anyway. If they bring Charlie out with them it'll save me going hunting for them. I think it's the use of your cabin they want. In that case

you two will be valuable as hostages and as a front to account for their using the place. They shouldn't hurt you."

"At least not till they do whatever they want the place for," she said. "I'm not a fool, Mike. After they get what they want they will kill us so we can't talk."

"You don't know that for certain," Shayne said. "Just like we don't really know what they're up to yet. Besides by that time I'll have taken a hand in the game again."

"Mike," she said then, "what do you think about my brother Rick? I don't think they let him take a plane to New York last night. Do you think they have him too?"

"I don't know," Mike Shayne said. It was only a half truth. He had no proof either way, but he thought that if Rick Lander was being held as a hostage by Simmons' people that fact would have been mentioned over the phone. In that case it might not even have been necessary to kidnap Charlie Conquest in order to get a hold over Sally. Anyone who knew her well would realize she loved her brother even more than her wastrel husband.

In his heart Shayne thought Richard Lander had probably been dead before he was taken

from the weekend house the night before. He wasn't going to add that idea to Sally's troubles just at this moment though.

She was under far too much strain already and he didn't want her nerve to break before he'd gotten a great deal further into the deadly game that was being played on this holiday weekend.

Lucy Hamilton and Eleanor Corbin were still playing bridge in the living room when Mike Shayne walked in from the sun deck.

Lucy took one look at him though and realized that something important had happened. Within minutes she managed to excuse herself from the game and join him. A deferential servant had brought Shayne a bottle of his favorite brandy and a glass. The big man poured himself a generous three fingers of the fiery drink and tossed it down as Lucy joined him.

"What happened over at Sally's?" she asked him. "I saw you go out in the skiff and then later on Charlie left with those toughs. I watched through the window but only you and Sally came back."

"There's something pretty bad going on there," Shayne said. He went on to fill his secretary in on the details of the afternoon.

"It's a kidnaping," he told

her in conclusion, "but not the usual sort of thing. It's not a question of a money ransom, at least as far as Charlie is concerned."

"There's money in it somewhere," Lucy Hamilton said. "There always is. Michael, you remember what we saw last night?"

"Sure."

"What I mean is the way that boat with the body in it went straight out to sea? There's not supposed to be a pass through the reefs here, is there?"

"Sally seemed to think not. On the other hand there's all sorts of ways to get through those shoals and reefs for even a fair sized craft. They used to come through them all the time when they were running in booze from Nassau. Back in World War Two the Navy tried to find them. People were taking supplies out to sell to the Nazi submarines. At least that's what they thought."

"Well?" Lucy Hamilton asked.

"Well what? I don't see why such a pass would be important these days. Most of the smuggling is by air. Still—" Shayne lifted a big hand to tug at the lobe of his left ear with thumb and forefinger. "Most of the old timers who knew about those passes are dead and gone."

Newcomers don't know or care, and I suppose storms have shifted or closed some of the passes. I don't know. Somebody wants to get in or out without being spotted. I don't know why though."

"Knowing you Michael, I suppose you're going to find out though."

"I'm going to try, Angel. We better watch to see if any boats go to Sally's, particularly if we see Charlie brought back. Then after dark I'll sneak over and try to get in through that utility shed or cellar or whatever under the platform."

That wasn't the way it worked out though.

For the rest of the afternoon either Shayne or Lucy Hamilton managed to keep the Conquest place under observation. About seven o'clock, moments before Eleanor called her guests to a lavish buffet supper, Shayne saw the same runabout that had left the place earlier return down the Bay from the direction of Miami.

It was still light enough for him to see that the same three men were aboard—Charlie Conquest and the two thugs who had fought with Shayne earlier. To his surprise he saw no sign of the man Simmons. Perhaps he'd be coming along later in a separate craft.

Shayne went in to help himself to a plate from the long buffet serving table Eleanor's caterer had set up in the living room. He ate heartily with the idea that he might need his strength for a long and rough night ahead.

He was working his way through a rich pastry dessert when one of the servants approached.

"Mr. Mike Shayne? You're wanted on the telephone, sir."

That was a surprise.

Shayne thought the call might be from Sally Conquest, but as soon as he heard the voice on the wire he knew it was the man who'd called Sally earlier that day.

"Hello, shamus," the voice said harshly. "This is your weekend fan club. I suppose you already noticed that good Charlie is back with his wife in their home."

"Did you call only to tell me that?" Shayne asked.

"Don't be precipitive," the voice said. "I'll tell you what I called for in my way when I get good and ready. I simply want you to remember there's two guns over there taking care of Charlie and his wife right now. That's just in case you should maybe get some ideas of your own."

"I hear you," the big man said.



"Well, make good and sure you do, shamus, because any ideas you could get wouldn't be as bright as you might think they were. Don't get any fancy notions, just do as you're told and everything will stay as smooth as silk."

"I haven't rocked the boat," Shayne told him.

"Just so you don't. Just so you don't even think about it. Now, the next thing you do, you borrow a boat. You're going to be taking a trip to town."

"What?" Mike Shayne was genuinely surprised.

"Just do what I say," the voice said. "I'm sure Sally has told you about that fool

brother of hers. The way she always made over him, she must be extremely fond of him. Well, we got him too, as you probably had sense enough to figure out when she said he was missing. She did tell you, didn't she?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "She told me."

"Well he went to town last night. We're holding him. You, shamus, are going to come in and have a talk with brother Rick so you can tell Sally all about it."

"That doesn't make sense," Shayne said. "Tell her yourself."

"Don't talk to me like that," the voice cried at him. "You do what I tell you. Borrow a boat and come to this address." He gave a street and number. "It shouldn't take you more than an hour."

"I don't like it."

"That's no matter at all. You do as you're told. If you aren't here inside two hours somebody over at Charlie Conquest's little palace is going to be shot. You hear that now."

The line went dead.

Mike Shayne arranged to borrow a fast speedboat from Eleanor Corbin for the run up to Miami. He told her it was a business emergency that would keep him out late into the evening but that he'd be back

only real way to put a man as dangerous as himself out of the picture for good was to do just that—put him out for good, rub him out.

He had to assume he was walking into an ambush from which he wasn't supposed to come out alive.

He sent the speedboat under the Crandon Park Causeway Bridge. Above him long lines of cars sped back and forth to the luxury hotels and park facilities that made Key Biscayne a major playground of the Gold Coast.

Shayne straightened out for the run up past the Port of Miami where the cruise ships docked.

He had no intention of letting himself be killed of course. The gun Sally Conquest had given him felt good against his stomach under his waistband. An armed and forewarned Mike Shayne wouldn't be an easy man to do away with no matter what sort of trap had been set for him.

Of course he might have called his friend Will Gentry and had police surround the house he was going to. Miami had a top notch police force. Whoever waited there would be taken or killed.

On the other hand that would blow the whistle on the whole caper. Sally and Charlie

Conquest might be killed. The leaders might well escape without their purpose in this seemingly senseless kidnaping ever having been discovered.

Shayne didn't want that to happen. He was going in alone as he'd been instructed and trust to his own ability to out think and out fight whoever might be waiting in ambush.

They probably expected him to dock the speedboat at one of the regular Marinas or boat rental docks along the City of Miami shoreline. There might even be people watching these to report his landing and tail him to the rendezvous.

Mike Shayne knew the area much too well to give his enemies that sort of advantage. The address he'd been given was one of the older homes on the North East side of town close to the Julia Tuttle Causeway to Miami Beach.

Slightly south of that causeway there were a number of private boat slips cut into the shoreline at a time when this was an area of luxurious mansions of the rich. Now most of the big old homes had been remodeled to serve as apartments or rooming houses. The people who lived there now couldn't afford yachts or anything bigger than an occasional skiff. The boat slips were still there though neglected and

fouled with garbage and drifting refuse from the busy Bay.

Shayne guided his speedboat into one of these with which he was familiar and tied it up to the remains of a rotting and half fallen landing. There was a chain and padlock with key on the boat which he used to make sure it would still be there when he returned.

Then he checked the gun in his belt, squared his shoulders, and cut through back yards to the street.

The big man had only a couple of blocks to go.

True to his training Shayne took the precaution of approaching the house from the rear instead of the front, cutting through from the block behind.

It was an old place, three stories and a garret high and built of heavy grey stone, faced and ornamented about the windows and doors with expensive baked Spanish decorator tiles. Apparently this one hadn't been turned into apartment units. Except for a light in the kitchen at ground front rear and a dim bulb in the front hall the place was unlit.

A glance in the window showed that the kitchen was empty and, with the ring of picks and master keys he always carried, Mike Shayne had the rear door open in seconds.

There was a man in the front hall but he was sitting on the floor back of a settee watching the front door for Shayne to showup.

The first the guard knew he wasn't alone was when the cold muzzle of Mike Shayne's thirty-eight nudged the back of his neck.

He froze.

"I could kill you easy," Shayne said, very low, to the back of the man's head. He could see big beads of the cold sweat of fear start out on the fellow's face.

"I was told I'd find Rick Landers here," Shayne said. "Is that the truth?"

"Honest to God. I swear it is," the man said in a hoarse whisper. "I'm supposed to take you to him."

"If it's that simple what are you doing hiding here in the hall?"

"Mister," the man said with feeling, "they told me you were a tough guy. They were right."

"Is Simmons in the house," Shayne asked then.

"Simmons? I don't know no—Oh, you must mean the boss."

"I mean the boss," Shayne said. "What do you call him? and where is he? I want to see him."

"That's Mr. Symeon," the

man said. "You can't see him. He ain't here now."

"You lie to me and I'll blow your head off," Shayne said. "Where is this boss?"

"I don't know. Honest to God, I don't know except he ain't here. All I'm supposed to do is take you to Lander."

Mike Shayne thought for a moment, tugging his ear lobe with his left hand. Then: "Okay you take me to Lander. Remember if anything even smells wrong, I pull the trigger of this gun, and it's your head plugging the muzzle when I do. You go real slow and easy and don't even make a slight mistake. You get me?"

"I get you, mister. Don't worry. I know when you got the drop on me."

He got to his feet and led Shayne along the hall towards the front of the building where a massive flight of stairs led up to the second floor. The other doors leading into the downstairs hall were closed, but Shayne could hear no sound coming from any of the rooms.

He followed his captive to the second floor and then to a door at the rear of the hall.

Shayne's every sense was alert as he momentarily expected a trap of some sort to be sprung, but he heard and saw nothing. Reflected light from the city and the street showed

the hall-empty of lurking forms. He heard nothing but children playing some game under the streetlight and the hum of traffic from block-distant Biscayne Boulevard.

His guide took the knob and twisted the door open and stepped inside, saying in a low voice: "Here he is, Mister Shayne."

It was a big room furnished in antique style. Right across from the door, between two windows was a big old fashioned bed. A figure lay there with his back to the door and his face on the pillow turned away.

Shayne's guide took two steps into the room and the figure on the bed started to roll over, fast. There was a glimmer of steel from a gun in his hand. At the same instant there was a bare whisper of sound, a drawn breath or the rub of shoe leather on flooring, from just to the left of the entrance.

Mike Shayne moved faster than any stranger would have believed possible for a man his size.

He brought up his big right foot, planted it squarely in the small of the back of the man he was following, and kicked him clear across the room right on top of the man on the bed.

The one on the bed got off a shot that hit the flying body

high on the left arm and another that went into the ceiling and brought down a shower of plaster. Then the flying body was on top of him.

Mike Shayne wasn't even watching. There had to be another one flattened against the wall by the door. Because the door itself swung to the right the man would be on the left.

Shayne dropped to his knees right across the sill.

The ambushed man's shot would have torn his heart out, if he'd stayed erect. As it was the slug went past a good foot over the top of the big private eye's head.

The man had time for only the one shot.

Shayne swung his big left arm like a scythe and took the fellow around both legs at knee height. That brought him down to where Mike Shayne could slam the barrel of the thirty-eight alongside his temple. That took the fight out of that one for sure.

By that time the two on the bed had begun to get themselves untangled. They looked up into the muzzle of the gun Shayne held covering them. They must have thought it was as big as a cannon.

The man who still held the gun thought better of trying to use it again. He tossed it out on

the floor halfway between Shayne and the bed.

"We give up, mister."

"Who else is in the house?"

Shayne was busy taking that gun and the one that had just missed his head off the floor.

"Nobody," the man on the bed said.

"Why should I believe that?"

"Three of us was supposed to be enough," the man on the bed said. "If Antony got the chance he was supposed to gun you in the hall or on the stairs after he let you in. If not we had three to take you here when you started across the room to see if I was this Rick character. Only you didn't start across the room—"

"He let himself in too,"

Antony said. Blood was running down his arm where he'd been wounded. "Say, ain't somebody going to tie up this hole in me?"

"Bind his arm with a sheet,"

Shayne directed. "Then tie up his hands and feet."

He himself tied up the man on the floor near the door. That one was breathing in hard, stertorous gasps. The blow on the head from Shayne's gun had given him a concussion. He'd be out of the picture for hours in any case.

Neither of the two who were conscious showed any signs of wanting to offer any further

resistance. Shayne didn't bother to gag them. If they called for help nobody was likely to hear. If anyone did come, he'd take one look and call the police which was the last thing this pair would want.

"All right now," Shayne said, "what's going on here?"

The talker was the man who had been playing the part of Richard Lander on the bed. "I don't know. All we know is we was hired to knock you off when you come to this house. We didn't know who you was or why you was to be killed. It was a contract, like you know, man. Nothing personal."

"Thanks for nothing," Shayne said drily. "I want more. I can cut the throats of the three of you easy enough if you don't talk."

"He's tellin' the truth." That was from Antony. "All we know is we was to knock over the man who showed up here. That was the contract. Why should we want to know any more than just that. We don't get paid for asking questions."

That part was probably true enough, Shayne thought.

"Okay then," he said next. "So suppose you tell me who hired you?"

"Don't you know?" Antony sounded honestly surprised.

"I don't have an enemy in the world," Shayne said and



grinned like a wolf. "Suppose you tell me."

When they hesitated he repeated: "Hurry up. Who was the boss?"

"I don't know," the man on the bed said. "The guys with him called him Mr. Symeon. That's all."

"Who was with him?" Shayne asked. "An Irishman and a Latino?"

"Oh no," Antony said. "We didn't see anybody like that. There was a little guy who didn't speak English. A China-

man or a Jap or something. Anyway yellow skin and black eyes. Him and a big tough hood who looked like a syndicate man. Them and Symeon is all we saw. The one giving the orders was Symeon."

"Yeah," the man on the bed said. "Just the three of them. They left an hour maybe before you showed up. I don't know where they went. Honest to God, mister."

"They said something about a boat," Antony added. "I don't know what boat."

Shayne thought with a sick feeling that he did know what boat it was and where the boat was going. He might even have passed it, going down Biscayne Bay as he came up.

"What about this Rick Lander I was supposed to meet here?" he asked.

"I'm afraid you ain't going to find him," Antony said. "The way Symeon talked they put this guy in the ocean last night. We didn't have nothing to do with that, though."

"This Symeon had a scar on the left side of his face?" Shayne asked.

"Left side, right side," Antony said. "Don't make no difference. He had one scar went right around his face from ear to ear."

Mike Shayne knew why Symeon had hidden his face

and run away at Sally Conquest's then. He knew where he'd seen the man's picture before and why.

"Symeon the Scar," Will Gentry had said. "The man with two mouths they call him. Number one on Uncle Whiskers' wanted list."

Mike Shayne had to get back to the Conquest's cabin as fast as he could possibly move.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE left the three hoods right there in the bedroom. One was still out cold from the concussion. The other two might work loose from their bonds later on. Maybe so, maybe not. Shayne didn't much care. If all went well with the adventure he had still to face this night, he'd call Will Gentry to send his boys and pick them up in the morning.

He couldn't call his old friend the police chief now, although he wanted to. At the first sign of police intervention the lives of Charlie and Sally Conquest wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel.

Conquest probably wouldn't be much loss to the world, but the big private eye had grown to both like and respect Sally Conquest. Besides he wasn't yet quite sure what the 'man with two mouths' was up to. He

couldn't spring a trap prematurely.

Before he left the house in Miami, Shayne investigated the other rooms. In one, on the second floor front, he found confirmation of his worst fears.

The big bedroom and its adjoining bath had been converted to something which Shayne recognized at once could only be called a regular bomb factory. The bedroom furniture was gone and replaced by a long zinc topped worktable. There were extra sinks connected by copper tubing to the regular water fixtures and a tank of natural gas to power jury rigged burners.

There were also cans and bottles of various chemicals, both liquid and solid, which the big man preferred to leave strictly alone.

That was what he'd been afraid he would find.

"They call him the man with two mouths," Will Gentry had said on that afternoon almost a year ago when he showed his friend the picture, "because that scar goes round his face and looks like another mouth the size of a crocodile's.

"Actually he's a killer. The worst sort of killer. He builds bombs that kill lots of people at one crack. That awful business in the department store in Tel Aviv was his doing. He's strictly

for sale to the highest bidder, and the high bidders for that sort of thing are always on the other side of those Curtains from our friends.

"Every police force in the country has been sent one of these pictures, Mike, because the people in Washington have reason to think he's come to America. They aren't sure and they don't know who he might be after, but they don't want to take any chances. If you see anybody like this or even hear a whisper about his being seen in this area, you call me fast, Mike."

"I'll do just that, Will," Shayne had said. "That's the sort of character I like least in the world, the sort that kills innocent bystanders for a fee."

He had meant it when he made the promise.

"Don't try to tackle this one by yourself," Will Gentry had added. "He's just about four times as tough as the next man in his league. This is government business. Let the Federal men handle this one."

That had made sense when Chief Gentry had said it. It still made all the sense in the world to Mike Shayne. Only now he was trapped in a situation where he had to go up against the man with two mouths all by himself or risk the lives of Charlie and Sally Conquest.

He also had to risk taking this man only to have some other agent or agents carry through with the murderous scheme that had brought the foreign agent to Miami and to Stiltsville. What Shayne had to do was discover the nature of the plan so that it could never again be attempted. By working alone he might possibly be able to accomplish just that.

He left the house and went back to where he'd left the borrowed speedboat tied up.

Luckily he was sure that none of Symeon's people had seen him dock the boat there. They wouldn't see him take her out either.

He hoped they would assume he had fallen into the trap they had left set for him at the bomb factory. As long as they did that, he'd have a certain amount of freedom of movement.

He kept his speedboat throttled down so as not to attract the attention of people on shore until he was well out in the Bay. Then he opened up the motor and went swiftly south between the twin walls of lighted buildings that marked midtown Miami and the Beach.

As he rode he did some hard thinking.

It was clear enough to the big man that Simmons or Symeon or whatever his name

might actually be had come to the Gold Coast to stage one of the bombing assassinations for which his name was famous around the world. The makeshift lab with its store of explosive components which Shayne had found proved that fact without any question.

The two questions that did remain were who the target of the bombing was to be and how Charlie and Sally Conquest and their weekend home at Stiltsville fitted into the picture.

Shayne found he could answer the second of the two questions first.

The Conquest cottage had to be important because it sat astride or close to the end of a pass by which a boat or boats could come in through the reefs and shoals that stretched almost unbroken from Key Biscayne down the seaward edge of Biscayne Bay.

Apparently it was a pass that even the Conquests hadn't known about. That meant it hadn't been used for a long time because the cottage had been there for years. Very probably the present Coast Guard and other authorities didn't know about it either.

If they did it would be only a line on an old chart, long ago rolled or folded and filed away in dead storage. Symeon wouldn't use the pass unless he was

already sure nobody was guarding it or even watching it.

It would be perfect for him. He could bring in something or somebody by boat to the Conquest cottage and hold it there until he was ready to strike.

He'd somehow gotten to know Charlie Conquest by gambling with him and gotten the man heavily in his debt. Then, when he was ready, it had been easy enough to arrange the weekend invitation for himself and his men.

Probably Sally's missing brother, Richard Lander, had seen or heard something that aroused his suspicions. They'd killed him then and taken his body out to sea. Weighted and dropped in the strong current of the Guld Stream it might never be found at all.

The one mistake they made was in using the secret pass through the reefs at the exact time that Mike Shayne and Lucy Hamilton had been watching from Eleanor Corbin's place. With any one else watching it might not have mattered. An ordinary weekend guest wouldn't have realized there was anything unusual in the course the runabout had taken. It took an old 'Miami hand' with the questioning mind of a detective to become suspicious.



Anyway the mistake had been made. In the morning Symeon had recognized Shayne's name when Charlie Conquest greeted him. He'd been rightly afraid that the private eye would recognize his scar if he got a good look at it.

Everything else had stemmed from that.

At least Shayne was onto the game in part. If only he knew what game it was.

He was still thinking hard as he rode under the bridge on the Crandon Park Causeway. From there on South he kept close to the western shore of Biscayne Key until he had passed the Marina and the long stretch where the new golf course was under construction.

After that he swerved further offshore to give a wide

berth to the Presidential Compound. The lights were on in those buildings now, which meant that President Nixon was probably in residence for a few days. With all the Convention activity soon to start on Miami Beach that wouldn't be unusual.

There were fences and barriers in the Bay offshore from the Compound of course. Outside of these a police boat and an armed Coast Guard cutter cruised slowly. No unauthorized craft would be allowed to come even close to the shore here.

Mike Shayne didn't want to be stopped and questioned so he gave the armed boats a respectfully wide berth.

His own destination was the Conquest weekend cabin, but he didn't go there directly. There'd be some kind of a guard or sentry posted for sure.

He circled wide out into the Bay, throttled down again until his speedboat made almost no sound and moved like a slow shadow on the water and then made for the landing on Eleanor Corbin's raft. He steered so as to keep the Corbin cabin between his boat and any watcher at the Conquest cottage.

Rain clouds had moved in from the Everglades and the sky was heavily overcast with none

of the moon glimmer of the night before on the water. That helped. So did the fact that a whole crowd of new guests had come out from town for Eleanor's party. From the number of new boats tied up at her landing since he'd left earlier in the evening he guessed they must have been coming and going every few minutes.

He grinned at the thought of how that must have bothered the watchers over at the Conquest cottage. By now they wouldn't have the slightest idea who had come or whether Shayne himself had come back.

Band music sounded from Eleanor's and there were couples strolling, dancing and drinking on the sun deck. Shayne was delighted.

Lucy Hamilton was waiting for him on the landing platform, sitting quietly in the shadow cast by the deck above.

He tied the speedboat close to where she sat.

"Awfully glad you're back safe and so early, Michael," she said. "Did you find Rick Lander?"

"Not a trace," he said, deliberately stretching the truth. "They did have a reception committee waiting for me, though."

He went on to outline to her what had happened at the big house in Miami. She listened

gravely. Lucy Hamilton had been the detective's confidante and good right hand for too long to have to have the obvious pointed out to her.

"A bomb factory and a political assassin," she said finally. "Michael, with both the political conventions on the Beach this summer. . . ."

She didn't have to finish.

"We don't have all summer to think about it," Shayne said. "When I went over there this morning I must have forced their hand. Even if they didn't have their caper set for tonight—and I think they did—it'll be set now. We've got only hours at the most, Angel. I have to take off now."

Lucy Hamilton didn't ask what he was going to do. She knew Mike Shayne too well.

"What can I do to help?"

"Just watch," he said. "If a boat comes in from the sea to Sally's, and I don't contact you within thirty minutes, then you call Will Gentry."

Shayne told her what to tell the Chief, and when he finished, Lucy's face was as grim as his own.

IX

MIKE SHAYNE didn't dare take the speedboat over to Sally Conquest's Stiltsville home. He was afraid it was too large and

would show up to any watcher as a dark hulk on the water. Besides, no matter how he throttled down the engine it would make some noise and show a visible wake.

Instead he took a small rowing dinghy that Eleanor Corbin kept for the children of her weekend guests to use in fishing expeditions on the flats.

He used one of the oars to scull slowly along and made a detour so as to approach the place from the south and east instead of from due west, which was where Eleanor's place was. With every minute that passed he blessed the heavy cloud cover and the slowly approaching rain.

A moon on the water would have made his attempt to reach Sally's place just about impossible.

He made it at last, letting the little dinghy drift the last few yards on the tide which had begun to run in over the long barrier of reef and flat.

Once under the platform he passed the little boat's painter around one of the pilings, being very careful to keep from cutting himself on the barnacles which crusted every inch.

In contrast to Eleanor's place there was no party going on up above, and once he got his eyes used to the dark and his ears to tuning out the gentle

lap of water on the pilings, he was able to get his bearings.

At this nearly low tide the flooring of the main building was at least ten feet above Shayne's head. However, he soon located the utility basement Sally had told him about. The floor of that was only about six feet up, and there was a rusted iron ladder for use by service men and mechanics.

Shayne worked his way over to the ladder through the thick pilings and tied his little ark to one of its rungs.

The key Sally had given him opened the trapdoor into the utility space. It was pitch dark in there until Shayne used the fountain-pen type flashlight he always carried with him.

The space was packed with machinery and fuel tanks of one sort or another. A man Shayne's size had some difficulty in moving about at all. Without the flashlight he might never have made it, but he didn't hesitate to use the flash in this completely confined space.

He knew he couldn't stay here long though. It was hot and the air was foul with the smells of oil and machinery. He was sweating profusely already.

There was nothing for it but to go on up.

He wasn't even sure what sort of odds he'd have to face.

The two men who had brought Charlie Conquest down the Bay past him that afternoon were probably here still. He could handle them, if they didn't get the drop on him.

This was probably also where Simmons-Symeon and his two friends had been heading when they left the Miami bomb factory. The two friends were unknown quantities as far as Shayne was concerned, but he figured Symeon would be the really tough one to deal with.

According to what Gentry had said, the man was as deadly in personal combat as a striking cobra or an angry jungle cat. With the others to back him he might prove even too tough for Mike Shayne to handle.

There was no going back now. There wasn't even time to stop and think any more. The Rubicon was crossed and the die cast.

Groping carefully, Shayne found himself under the second trapdoor.

The key that had let him in through the floor of the utility cellar fitted the lock to this trap also. Shayne knew that it opened up into the kitchen. He didn't know exactly where in the kitchen and most important of all he didn't know whether Symeon or some of his friends would be in the kitchen

hen he started to come rough the floor.

If Symeon was there and saw trap door suddenly start to pen in the floor before his yes, Mike Shayne could nagine easily enough what ould happen next.

He raised the trapdoor a ouple of inches, slowly and arefully. He still couldn't tell xactly where he was, except hat he seemed to be near one all. However his eyes quickly canned the kitchen floor. As ar as he could tell no one was tanding there.

He opened the trap the rest of the way and crawled out. It was a small trapdoor and he had a tight squeeze getting his broad houlders through. Also he discovered then that the opening was under a large kitchen work table. He had to wriggle out from under that before he could stand erect.

He was alone in the kitchen. As he stood there listening and getting his bearings he could hear nothing but the music and voices coming over the water from Eleanor Corbin's party. Unfortunately the party was in full swing and the guests were making noise.

Shayne didn't hear the door from the kitchen to the living room start to swing on its hinges. He saw it out of the corner of his eye.



The big detective had his gun out. He flattened himself against the kitchen wall at the side of the door.

It opened and a man came in. It was the big Irishman who'd been playing cards with Charlie Conquest that morning, which now seemed so very long ago. He walked across the kitchen to the electric range, where a big pot of coffee was perking away with a muted chug-chug sound.

He didn't see Shayne till he turned around after pouring a cup of hot coffee and saw the detective's gun levelled at his midriff.

"Just set that cup on the stove," Shayne ordered in a low tone that still carried menace to the man's ears. "Don't drop it. Don't open your mouth. I took you once today. I took all three of them at the house in Miami. I can take you."

The man stood there with his face whitened by shock for a minute and then very carefully put the coffee back down on the stove. His lips worked but no sound at all came out.

"Shove both hands down inside your pants in the front under that belt you're wearing," Shayne ordered, "and then freeze. If you play ball, I'll come over there and tie you up. If you don't I won't mind at all cutting that fat throat of yours or blowing your head off."

He saw the man's eyes change then, and realized he'd said the wrong thing.

"You ain't gonna shoot," the man said as realization dawned. "One shot will bring the rest of them on you."

Mike Shayne didn't wait till the thug's not overly bright mind could take that thought one step further.

When he saw the mouth start to open to yell a warning to his friends, the big detective went into action.

He could move as fast as the proverbial striking snake when

he wanted to, and this time he had all the incentive in the world.

Two long strides took him across the kitchen floor to where the other man stood. One big hand got the fellow around the throat with a grip that kept any sound louder than the squeek of a scared mouse from coming out.

With the other hand Shayne hit the man over the head with the barrel of his thirty-eight police positive.

He eased the heavy body to the floor without making any noise. Then he bent over and started to tie the unconscious man with kitchen towels and his own belt.

He didn't hear the kitchen door start to swing on its well-oiled hinges at his back. The first thing he did hear was the voice which said:

"I've a gun aimed at your back, sir. Stand up slowly and put your hands in the air."

X

MIKE SHAYNE'S own gun was still in his belt where he'd shoved it when he started to tie up the big Irishman. He did what the voice said—got to his feet and put both hands up over his head. There was an unaccustomed feeling at the pit of his stomach.

"Turn around, slowly," the calm voice said in perfectly unaccented English. "Very slowly and carefully."

When Shayne turned he saw that his captor must be the "little yellow man" Antony and his friend had told him about. The fellow might have been a Chinese or Japanese, but somehow Shayne didn't think so. He was thin and light boned and stood only a bit over five feet tall. He was formally and neatly dressed in an expensive looking suit, white shirt and foulard tie.

What struck Shayne the most was the man's face. This wasn't the face of a hoodlum or a thug like Symeon's other associates. The eyes were intelligent, the face that of a well bred and educated man. Only around and in the jet black eyes was a look of sparkling, nervous intensity that Mike Shayne recognized as one of the marks of the religious or political fanatic.

The little man was looking him over carefully.

"I suppose you must be the Mr. Shayne they told me about," he said, still in that low, cultivated voice. "They assured me you'd be taken care of at the house in Miami, but I suppose they underestimated you badly. It's a mistake I won't make, Mr. Shayne."

Mike Shayne wondered if he could pull his gun out in time to get this man. He'd about decided that he couldn't but would have to make the try anyway, when the man called out in a louder tone:

"Mrs. Conquest, will you come in here, please."

Shayne heard footsteps in the living room and then Sally Conquest came through the door into the kitchen. When she saw him there with his hands in the air she stopped dead in her tracks, but the detective had to admire her magnificent self control. Except for a slight widening of the lovely brown eyes, her face showed no emotion.

It was enough for the yellow man to note however.

"I see that you recognize our friend Mr. Shayne," he said. "If you were counting on him to rescue you and your husband, I'm afraid that I've spoiled it for you. Please go behind Mr. Shayne and very carefully lift the gun out of his belt and bring it to me. Carefully. I don't like to shoot my own gun, but I will. Believe me, I will."

"I believe you, Mr. Fong," Sally Conquest said in a tone that made Mike Shayne believe him too.

She did as the man instructed her.

"You can sit down at the table," Fong told Shayne. "But be careful to keep your hands flat on the table top, where I can see them all the time."

"Why don't you just call in the others and get it over with?" Shayne asked. "You are going to kill me, I suppose."

"The others aren't here," Sally said before the yellow man could stop her. "They went out to sea in the runabout while you were gone. Straight out, through a pass I didn't know was there."

"You shouldn't have said that, Mrs. Conquest," Fong said. "Now I will probably have to let them kill you too."

"Nonsense," Sally said. "We've all been doomed since you decided to use this place for your plans. If I can admit it, why can't you. It doesn't change anything to pretend."

"I'm sorry," Fong said. "You shouldn't have interfered with our plan."

"It wasn't that good a plan," Mike Shayne said suddenly. "Someone was bound to interfere. I don't know why you ever thought you had a chance to get away with assassinating the President of this country."

"Oh my God," Sally Conquest said.

Mr. Fong smiled: "We don't. Oh, possibly, we could manage

if the President was in residence. If we could have waited till next week, we might have tried. He will be on your island then, but tonight will do as well. His confidential foreign policy man is there, and no one alone. The good doctor is entertaining his opposite number from the Kremlin. They are deciding how to make a deal to dispose of my country. That won't happen. They'll both die and it will drive a wedge of suspicion and fear between your two nations."

He smiled, and now it was a smile of pure fanaticism. This man was as full of hate as a ripe peach is of juice.

Mike Shayne knew now that he had nothing whatever to lose and began to brace himself.

"You must be from Hanoi Fong?" he said.

"That's close enough," Fong said. "I am a patriot. I will not let your countries force a peace on us that we do not want. Tonight the men who might agree upon our betrayal will die."

"What did we have to do with that?" Sally Conquest said, and started to walk over towards the stove. "You certainly did not need our weekend home."

"It was here," Fong said. "Because of your husband's weakness for gambling we could

gain access. What are you doing?"

Mike Shayne spoke then to distract attention from Sally Conquest. This Fong was a killer but not a professional. He'd forgotten details that Symeon would have attended to first of all.

"I think I have that figured," he said. "It was a brilliant plan. Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Fong. You had to have this place because it sat at the channel by which you are bringing in the weapon of assassination. The Presidential Compound is guarded, Sally. You can't drive in or walk in or bring a boat close. No unidentified or unauthorized plane can fly over.

"It would take a small army to storm the place and by then police and troops would be called in. No, they had to have a long distance weapon that couldn't be smuggled in by any of the usual ways.

"So they had the brilliant idea. Bring it by boat at night, by a channel nobody watches because nobody knows it's here. That's where Symeon and the others are now, I bet. The weapon is being mounted on your boat at a rendezvous with a freighter out to sea. They'll bring it back past here and fire it from the middle of Biscayne Bay out past the guard boats. It



will be Symeon's great triumph."

"No," Fong said. "It will be me that destroys the foreign devils. I, Fong, will push the button to fire the rockets. Mine the honor and the glory."

That was when the man Mike Shayne had tied up on the floor groaned and moved his legs about.

Fong turned his head to look.

"Now, Sally!" Mike Shayne yelled.

Sally Conquest grabbed the big pot of coffee off the stove and threw it at Fong's head.

He didn't dodge fast enough. The heavy pot struck his forehead and some of the scalding liquid splashed out over his face.

Fong screamed and tried to ward the pot off with his hands.

Mike Shayne was around the table like a striking jaguar leaping on its prey. His right hand punch broke Fong's jaw and knocked him unconscious on the floor.

Then he had his gun back.

"Where's Charlie?"

"They gave him a sedative," Sally said. "He's out like a light in our bedroom."

"Where's your phone?"

"They cut the cord. My God, Mike that boat's due back here any minute. They planned to pick up Fong here, and I suppose kill Charlie and me."

"Rockets," Shayne said. "A launcher with twin combat rockets mounted on the stern of the runabout. They'd have the range figured long ago. They might bring it off."

"We have to stop them." Then: "Can we stop them, Mike?"

"I don't know," Mike

Shayne said. "I don't know if we can, but I know that we're going to have to. There has to be a way, if I can just get it into my mind."

"I could take one of the boats over to Eleanor's place," Sally said. "The phone there will be working. I could call for help."

"There wouldn't be time for it to get here," he said. "That boat is due back to pick up this Oriental hero any minute now. Any minute."

"There are men over there." Then she saw his face. "That's right. They aren't trained. They'd just get themselves killed."

"So they would," Shayne said. "Besides, any mass attempt to stop Symeon would only alert him. He could fire those rockets from here if he had to. The Presidential Compound is in easy range. No. Whatever we do, it has to be something that doesn't give him any warning at all."

"But what, Mike? What?"

"Hold on," the big redhead said then. "I think I'm beginning to get an idea. Tie up Fong. Tie him to the doorknob by his wrists and then tie his ankles."

While Sally was doing that Mike Shayne pulled aside the big kitchen table which covered the trapdoor by which he'd

gained access to the room. There was a switch, and he turned on a light in the storage space and went quickly down the ladder.

He could see the place clearly now. There was an electric generator and motor, units to power the air conditioning and other machinery. Then he saw what he was looking for.

The kitchen cooking range was gas and not electric. Here, under the floor, was the tank which supplied the gas. It was designed to hold two hundred pounds of gas, liquefied under pressure, and was about four feet tall and made of heavy metal.

It took Shayne only a few minutes to unbolt the tank from its brackets and the pipe leading through the kitchen floor to the range.

Getting the large tank hoisted up through the floor trap into the kitchen was a lot harder. It took all of the big man's strength, even with Sally Conquest helping by pulling from above. He was sweating and nearly winded by the time they got it done.

After that they dragged the tank through the living room and out on the sun deck to the head of the ladder leading up from the mooring raft below.

On Shayne's orders Sally

went back and turned out all but one of the lights in the house itself. She also untied Fong from the door in the kitchen and brought him out on the deck.

"Don't you want him gagged?" she asked the detective.

"No. Your friends are going to stop for you, aren't they?" he asked the bound and venomously glaring little man.

Fong didn't answer.

"Sure they are," Shayne said. "You want the honor of firing those things, you said."

"Here they come now," Sally said and pointed.

Shayne could see the white V of foam at the bow of the runabout as it came swiftly twisting through the channel. He could also see the dark humps of the rocket launchers on the stern as the boat came closer.

Fong struggled and started to squawk. Shayne hit him a blow that knocked him unconscious. He and Sally crouched down behind the railing.

The runabout came smoothly up to the raft at the base of the ladder. The motor was throttled down almost to a purr. One of the men below caught the side of the raft and called up: "Are you there, Fong? Hurry up, man."

Mike Shayne hoisted the

unconscious man just enough so that his head and shoulders showed in silhouette against the night sky. Sally held him there.

"Hurry," the voice called again from below. "We ain't got all night."

Mike Shayne grabbed the two-hundred-pound-plus tank of liquid gas. It took all his immense strength, but he hoisted it up at arm's length above his head and took a single step to the railing where the ladder came up.

"You got all the time in the world," he said, and hurled the tank out and down.

There was a wild yell from below and then a splintering crash as the tank went through the floor boards and the bottom of the boat. A moment later the boat and its deadly rockets were gone down into twelve feet of night-black water.

Symeon and his two thugs were choking salt water and grabbing for the edge of the raft. When they pulled themselves out they faced the muzzle of a gun held rock-steady in the detective's big hand. The fight was gone out of them anyway with the loss of the rockets.

Hours later Mike Shayne and Lucy Hamilton sat in the Miami Police Chief's office talking with Will Gentry and a pair of

quiet, cold eyed Federal men.

"Once I remembered who Symeon was I had to figure out what he'd need a boat for," Shayne said to Will Gentry and the others. "Then it began to fall in line. A political assassin and a bomber and the Presidential Compound. What else on the Bay is a bomb target? Then the channel. A way to get a weapon in and be sure it wasn't seen."

"You should have called us," the Federal agent in the blue tie said.

"It was already too late for that," Shayne said. "I was only sure after I got Fong to talking."

"Their big mistake was coming back for Fong," the other Federal man said. "Except for that they might even have pulled it off."

"No," Shayne said, "Their mistake was being the sort of people they are. They could have just held Mrs. Conquest's brother prisoner. Then Lucy and I would never have seen anything to make us suspicious. I wouldn't have gone over there the next morning and spooked Symeon. Killers always kill too much and too carelessly."

Mike Shayne turned to Lucy Hamilton. "Let's be on our way, angel," he said. "I owe you a good dinner—a good Vietnamese dinner." He grinned.



THE ALLIANCE

by TREVOR BLACK

He was young, new in the ways of crime. But he knew how to live. And more important—how to die.

THE KID was green and jumpy.

"Sit down," I said.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I got tied up in traf—"

"Sit down," I repeated.

He sat. Nervously, he lit a cigarette, blowing smoke. It made him cough.

"What's your name?" I asked.

Surprised, he frowned. The

young face looked older with the wrinkled brow. "Floyd Tellman. Didn't you talk to Crantz?" The voice trailed off and the kid glanced left and right, like maybe he was in the wrong room.

He wasn't. But I had to check the name. A small detail. Start forgetting the details and you can forget about living.

"Your hair's too long," I said evenly, with no trace of anything in my voice.

It was a test and he passed. There were no smart replies, no immediate outbursts reflecting few brains, little maturity.

No. This one just stared and when he was through with that he asked me, "Why do you say that?" The hands had stopped shaking. The cigarette had been crushed out.

"People notice long hair," I explained, "and once they see the hair, they go a little lower. The face. They see your face, some may remember it and you're no longer one in a crowd. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes. I'll get it cut."

"This afternoon. No later."

"All right."

The kid was doing okay. One of the problems in working with younger people is that they know everything. It's a joke; they usually know just

enough to get themselves, and anyone with them, killed.

"Stand up," I said.

Amused, he rose from the chair, grinning. "Do I pass inspection?" he asked, watching.

"Uh huh. Six feet. About 180. Right?"

He shook his head. "Ten pounds light. I keep it in the right places. It's pret—"

I threw an ashtray at him. He dodged neatly, without trying to catch it.

"Nice. Very, very nice." I smiled. "Sit down."

He reclaimed the same chair. "What was that all about?"

"A test. You move too slow and you might make me a dead man someday. Better to find out now."

Shrugging, he said nothing, but I could tell I had made an impression. Behind the blank face he was taking me apart the best he could.

"What did Crantz tell you about me?" I said it offhand, unimportantly.

"Only that you need a partner. He let me know your name, Dunne. I asked him more but he wouldn't say anything."

That pleased me. Crantz was an old friend and sometimes old friends have a habit of running at the mouth. Especially to strangers.

"What have you done?" I asked.

"Two jobs. Small ones. A liquor store payroll with Crantz and a branch bank heist with Fred Alexander."

I nodded. Alexander was a good man; I had used him twice.

"Which bank did you score on?" I said.

His eyes didn't move off my face.

"I'd rather not say," he told me.

Which was fine. He was smart enough to avoid the pitfall of too many men; don't name exact dates and places.

"All right," I said. "I need a partner. The last one I had was with me for seven years. He was one of the best, perhaps the finest driver in the business. A great shot, handguns and shotgun. He didn't miss.

"He had one failing and it made him a dead man. He found a woman and kept her and she started talking. She talked and talked and talked and then she couldn't talk any more because someone shot her. He tried to even the score. Revenge."

I stopped, remembering. I suppose my face was sour. "It didn't work. He got himself - killed," I finished.

The kid, Floyd, looked sad.

"Police?" he said.

"No. Me."

The sad look was gone. He wanted to escape my fixed stare but gutted it out. I admired him for that.

"Let me clarify something, Floyd. I steal because I can make more money stealing than any other way. I have a college degree. Two of them, in fact. They mean nothing. I stay alive and I live well. But I never forget something and you'd better not either. I'm outside society. I contribute nothing. I owe nothing. I take, that's all. I enjoy what I do."

Floyd sniffed. "I understand."

"Do you? I wonder. In years you might. If you survive. A criminal either stays in or out of jail. Simple, no? But the hard part is staying out. The professional stays out; his entire life is devoted to that end."

"And there are tricks, right?" Floyd asked me.

"Yes. Keep away from people. Try not to develop habits that can place you, pin a name on you. Don't eat at the same restaurants, go to the same shows, collect junk. Simple things really. You forget them and you're slicing your own wrist."

"What about the police?"

"The police," I said slowly, "are either capable or dumb. There are geniuses in police

departments and there are some police dogs who are smarter than the guy at the other end of the leash. You think cops are all stupid and you've got a one-way ticket to nowhere. You'll get caught. And don't ever kill one. The movies are right about that. Kill a policeman and they never will stop looking for you. Never."

We talked for a long time. The kid impressed me. After the initial nervousness left him, he was confident, not cocky, intelligent but not smart aleck. I fed him loaded questions and he kept feeding me back the right answers.

"Crantz mentioned you have something," I said.

He nodded. "Right. A lawyer here in town. He's going to have a suitcase containing \$25,000 in cash. I know when and the route he's taking."

"Route?"

"To a ranch. One of his clients needs the cash for a quick deal. I know the rancher. He's not very honest but he's very rich."

"What denominations are the bills?"

"Sorry," Floyd said. "I don't know for sure. But it fits in one suitcase. It's about this size."

His hands measured the normal one-suitcase size.

"It sounds good," I agreed.

"Are we together?"

"How soon does this take place?"

"Tomorrow in the late morning."

I studied the face in front of me. "How did you learn about the delivery?"

"I'd just as soon keep that quiet."

"All right. I have your phone number. I'll call you at—" I checked my watch—"Six o'clock."

"Fine."

"Where you going now?"

His grin was pure Burt Lancaster. "To get my hair cut," he told me.

As soon as the kid left, I phoned Crantz. "He looks good," I said.

"Sure," the familiar, rough voice said, "knew he would. He's a cool kid, and not fresh either."

"Well, be seeing you."

"Sure. Stay alive, Dunne."

Crantz had given me the kid's address. It was in an indifferent part of the city. Some of the buildings were new, others were surrounded by cracked sidewalks and monstrous weeds. I found the address I wanted and walked up to the gate.

It was a duplex, nothing elaborate, but not a slum either. Out in the middle of the dirt yard, an old man sat in a

folding chair, sunning himself.

I smiled at the sunbather, swinging open the gate. "Hi. I'm looking for Floyd Tellman."

The old man squinted at me. "He's in B. 'Round back. Don't think he's in now though."

"You know Floyd?"

He was willing to talk. "Pretty well. Nice fella. Quiet, know what I mean? None of that loud music. No loud-mouthed friends either."

"Yes, that sounds like Floyd." I thanked him and went down the sidewalk to the back apartment. The front door was locked, but there was a screen over an open window. Since the window faced an alley, and no spectators, I got the screen out of the way and crawled in.

It was obvious why Floyd had left a window open. It was stuffy and warm inside here. I opened the window wider. The apartment consisted of a living room, a tiny bedroom, and a kitchenette. The walls were white and the furniture was the kind you see marked, "*Three rooms of fine furnishings for \$99.00!*"

What I liked best was the fact it appeared as though no one lived in this apartment. No books, records or autographed photos. Nothing. I never forget Max Snyder. Max was a careful



pro who specialized in payroll holdups. He had been imprisoned once and probably would have stayed out of jail if it hadn't been for the comic books. He read the things constantly and bought them at the same store. The store had their name on the price tag and a price tag was placed on the cover of each book.

Max made an enemy; the enemy squealed. The police missed Max at his place but they found twenty or thirty comic books. They waited long enough for him to return to the store and it was easy from there. Max got fifteen-twenty years.

Floyd Tellman evidently had

no habits or close friends. There were no pictures, letters, nothing of a personal nature. He had very little clothing in the closet and not a single thing had a laundry mark or manufacturer's label. Floyd was careful. Very careful.

In his bottom dresser drawer I found a Colt .357 Magnum revolver. It looked almost new; the blue finish was unscratched. I noted with approval the gun had the six-inch barrel which reduces muzzle blast. I replaced the gun and left.

I had found no surprises, and that pleased me. Floyd Tellman might make me a good partner.

"THAT'S THE CAR," Floyd said and he pulled out into traffic, following a Cadillac.

I nodded, saying nothing. It was a clear morning and there were enough locals and tourists plugging along to make this interesting. Floyd was a good driver, keeping close but not too close.

We moved through the city without conversation. I noticed my partner's hair was clipped short, shorter than mine. I smiled at the dashboard.

The Cadillac had turned onto a main highway. We weren't far behind.

"About two miles and he goes off," Floyd said.

It went perfectly. The

Cadillac did as it was supposed to, taking the right off ramp. We were nearer now to the Cad and there was light traffic.

"Just ahead," my driver told me.

Ahead was a curve in the highway with a large shoulder. Floyd floored our car and we jumped forward, moving beside the Cad. I looked over and the driver was flailing his hand at us and trying to watch the road at the same time.

Expertly, Floyd forced him off the blacktop onto the shoulder. There wasn't another car in sight.

Our friend was mad. He came bursting out of the Cad shaking his fist, yelling loudly.

He stopped when he saw our masks. Mine was Peter Pan and Floyd was a pirate.

"The money," I said quietly, pointing at him with my Colt Cobra.

He stiffened noticeably. "What—"

"Get the money. Hurry!" I stepped forward.

Floyd was behind the man, pushing his gun against the lawyer's back. The man hustled, reached in the front seat of the Cadillac, and handed Floyd the suitcase.

My new partner gave it to me. I started to turn when I heard the first shot. There were four of them in rapid succession

and the lawyer was a dead, crumpled mass.

"You crazy idiot!" I shouted, running back to our car.

He came over, dropped calmly into the driver's seat, and drove us out of there.

Ten minutes later we were back in my motel room. Floyd Tellman was in the same chair as before and I was frowning.

"Why?" I asked.

"The last tie," he said.

"What?"

"He was my father. My father, who beat me when he was drunk and ignored me when he was sober."

I breathed heavily.

"So now this makes it right," I said wearily.

"No," he replied evenly. "It makes him dead."

I liked the answer. Even considering the circumstances, I liked it. It sounded almost like myself. And this kid had nerve. One day he might want more than fifty percent of the haul.

I looked closely, and behind the eyes was humor, laughter there. Yes, someday he'd want more than fifty percent. But that was all right. I'd be ready, like always.

I stuck out my hand.

"It's nice to have a new partner," was all I said.

Complete in the JANUARY, 1973 Issue-

THE SPY WHO CAME HOME

A Thrilling New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Murder was the name of the game and you made your own rules. But Mike Shayne knew that unless he solved this case immediately he was marked for certain extermination. Cautiously the Miami redhead private detective followed the lethal clue the CIA labeled, "Death to the Finder!" However, good men die before this big espionage novel runs its course.

HELL IN A BASKET

by JAMES HOLDING



LIEUTENANT RANDALL thought there was something fishy about the whole thing right from the beginning when Captain Forbes, his superior, told him on Wednesday morning to go out to Capucino's Carnival and get the facts about the death of one Ram Singh. A call had just come in; an ambulance and the medical examiner were already on their way.

"An Indian?" Randall asked.

"A Hindu I suppose, with a name like that," said Captain Forbes acidly. "He was the snake charmer in the side show."

"How'd he die?" Randall asked.

"The man who called said his snake bit him."

Randall, already on his way out, paused. "Snake-bit? Then where do we come in? Why the Homicide Bureau?"

"How do I know?" Forbes growled at him. "Don't stand there asking me questions. Get out and ask the Carnival boss, Capucino."

Capucino, owner and manager of Capucino's Carnival, was a short, beefy, bushy-browed specimen with the fast-paced talking habits of a circus barker. Randall found him on the lot.

"It was the worst shock ever I had," Capucino said as he led Randall toward a small house trailer that was parked behind the deserted side show tent. Randall could see the police ambulance standing beside the trailer. "I go into Whitey's

He looked at me mockingly, daring me to charge him with murder. And, looking at the corpse and the sinister basket, I remembered, "The kiss of a cobra is death."



trailer half an hour ago, to see why he don't show up for breakfast, and I practically stumble over him. He's lying there on the floor right next to the basket where he keeps King, and he's dead as a last year's hollyhock!"

"I thought the guy was a Hindu," Randall said. "Name of Ram Singh."

"Whitey Whitaker was his real name. He just put on a body stain and a turban and a beard for his snake-charming act, see? He was an American, Whitey was. But we billed him as The Great Ram Singh, Ruler of Reptiles."

"Oh," said Randall. They were approaching the trailer. "And I gather that King, who lives in a basket in Whitey's trailer, is his snake?"

"Sure, sure," Capucino nodded. "King's his snake." They reached the trailer. "Only one he had."

They went into the trailer. Christy Huneker, the M. E., was just getting up from a squatting position beside Whitey's body.

"Ah, Randall," Huneker said pleasantly. "Nothing here for you, I'm afraid. This guy died of snake bite."

"What kind of snake?" Randall asked curiously.

"Cobra," Capucino said. He pointed. "He's in there."

Their eyes went to a shallow,

pot-bellied, covered basket of woven straw that stood in one corner of the room.

Randall asked, "Isn't there some kind of serum you can take when you're bitten by a snake, Doc?"

The doctor nodded. "Antivenin. But you've got to have it handy when needed. How about that, Mr. Capucino? Wouldn't a man who handled a poisonous snake keep a supply of antivenin handy, just in case?"

"Yes," Capucino said. "I'm sure Whitey had it around some place. Andy always did, I know. And Whitey took over from Andy."

Capucino went to a small wall cabinet above the bed and rooted through it.

"Here's the serum," he said, holding up a sealed phial, "and the hypodermic to inject it with."

"Probably too drunk to use it when the snake bit him," the doctor said. "He'd been drinking. You can still smell it on him." He tipped a hand to Randall. "I've got to get back to town. You coming?"

Randall said, "Not for a minute. I'll call you later to verify, Doc." The ambulance men came in and carried Whitaker's body from the room on a stretcher. Dr. Huneker left, too.

"Let's see the snake," Randall said.

Capucino approached the basket in the corner, cautiously reached out a hand and took the weighted cover off. He jumped back. Nothing happened immediately, although Randall could hear a dry stirring, as though of disturbed leaves, in the basket. Then a nightmare triangular head emerged sleepily from the basket, and two yellow, lidless eyes regarded them solemnly, while a black forked tongue flicked questingly in and out of the armored mouth.

Randall, whose own eyes were the joke of the department because they were of a strange, sulphur-yellow color and seemed seldom to blink, was stared down immediately by the snake. It was no contest at all.

"Put the lid on, Capucino," he said in a nervous voice, "before the damn snake bites us."

"Call me Cap," the carnival man said. "Everybody does." He took a long pole from another corner of the room, slid it through the loop on the basket lid, gingerly reached out and dropped the lid down over the basket opening. The snake's head disappeared. Capucino came back and sat down on the unmade bed.



"Look, Lieutenant," he said in a neutral voice, "I called you because I think there's more to this than a snake biting a guy who's had too much booze. Whitey always drank a good deal when he went to bed. Every night. He claimed it helped him sleep. He had an old bayonet wound in his gut from Korea that ached him pretty bad, and the whiskey eased it up, he said."

"What's on your mind then?" Randall asked.

"The snake," Capucino said, leaning forward and putting his elbows on his knees. "King's on my mind. King couldn't have bit Whitey and killed him."

Randall slowly lowered himself into a straight chair. "Give me that again," he said.

"King couldn't have bit Whitey," Capucino repeated

doggedly. "It sounds nutty as hell, but it's true. I think that's another snake over there in the basket, Lieutenant. Another snake entirely."

"What!" Randall stared.

"King couldn't have bit Whitey. He was de-fanged."

"He was what?"

"De-fanged. Had his fangs pulled by a vet. Like you go to a dentist and have your wisdom teeth pulled out. Sort of the same thing."

Randall felt suddenly out of his depth. "You mean Whitey's snake didn't have any fangs left to bite with?"

"He still had teeth, understand. So he could eat the rats and mice and things that Whitey fed him, but his poison fangs was gone. So he was harmless, see?"

Randall looked at the snake basket in the corner. "Can you tell if it's a different snake from its appearance?"

"Not me. I'm no snake expert. And I ain't about to examine him close-up. Hell, I never had a snake act in my show at all until two years ago, and now I wish I never had one."

"Isn't there anybody around here can tell for sure whether that's King over there in the basket?"

Capucino hesitated. "I can't think of anybody much," he

said, "now that Whitey's gone. Gloriana, maybe. Or Andy Grissom. But he's not around any more, either."

"Who's this Gloriana?"

"One of my tumblers. Acrobat. A great kid, Lieutenant. Pretty as hell, and built like a brick outhouse. I never could get to first base with her, though." He sighed, profoundly saddened by his memories. "First it was Andy, and then Whitey that she went for. But just let me, the boss, make a pass, and it was 'aren't you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Capucino!' You know how that goes?"

Randall grinned. "Not me," he said. "I got a wife and two kids."

Capucino said with dignity, "So have I. But that don't mean I can't like an acrobat, too."

"You say Gloriana spent a lot of time with Whitey?"

"Yeah. They played house a good bit in his trailer here."

"And this other fellow, Andy Grissom. Was he Whitey's predecessor?"

"Yeah, he used to be our snake charmer before Whitey. Andy was the original Ram Singh, the first snake act we ever had in the show. And King was his snake. Andy's, I mean. Andy trained him, and worked up the act and I hired them for my side show a coupla years

back. It wasn't much of a act, really, but the marks went for it big.

"Andy dressed up like a Hindu and squatted down in front of King's basket on the platform, and tottled a little tune on a whistle he had. When he played on the pipe, King sticks his head up out of the basket and blows out his hood like he's mad, and kind of waves himself around like dancing. And every once in a while, he tries to strike at Andy, but he never gets out of the basket. It's a smash with the yokels, Lieutenant, a real draw."

"And this is the same act that Whitey has been doing?" Randall asked.

"Sure. Same thing. Andy taught Whitey the routine before he left."

"Left?"

"Andy left the show. But he turned over his snake and his act to Whitey, so we'd still have a Ram Singh."

"Pretty big-hearted, wasn't he? Was Whitey a good friend of his?"

"Not exactly. Whitey was just a ambitious helper on my ferris wheel when Andy gave him his chance to be snake charmer."

"Then how come he picked out Whitey for the job?"

Capucino blinked several

times and shrugged. "Because of Gloriana, maybe."

"Gloriana was Andy's girl friend before she was Whitey's?"

"Yep. Whitey kind of took her away from Andy." He grinned. "She changed trailers, you might say. You know the way girls are. She decided she'd rather play house with Whitey than Andy. Perfectly simple, Lieutenant. Happens all the time. Even with married folks." He squinted at Randall.

"And how did Andy Grisom take that?"

"Oh, normal, I'd say. He was pretty burned at first, but he got over it quick. It broke up his little family." Capucino chuckled at his own euphemism. "Some family," he said, raising his bushy eyebrows humorously. "A snake and an acrobat, and a fake Hindu."

Randall said, "He didn't seem specially sore at Whitey Whitaker?"

"Naw."

"But Andy could have had it in for Whitey all the same. Maybe he just kept it hidden," Randall said.

Capucino shook his head. "The hell with that. What you want to know, Lieutenant, is who changed the snakes in Whitey's basket over there."

"Tell me some more about this de-fanging deal. If a vet did



it, he ought to be able to identify King, and be able to testify that this is a different snake, oughtn't he?"

"Sure."

"So who's the vet?"

"I never heard his name. And he's five hundred miles away, anyhow. In Indianapolis. That's where my Carnival was playing when Andy took King to be de-fanged."

Randall brooded. Capucino said, "Damn, I wish Andy hadn't give his snake to Whitey and didn't leave the show at all. Or I wish he'd of taken the snake with him. Poor Whitey. He was a good kid, coming along fine, going to be a real

carny hand before long. I liked him."

Capucino lit a cigarette with a kitchen match and flicked the match stick toward the snake basket. Randall stared at the little wall cabinet where Whitey had kept his antivenin.

"He kept his antivenin in that cabinet," Randall said. "Only a few feet from where he collapsed. Seems funny he wouldn't have been able to make it just those few feet and give himself the shot."

"Not if you remember Whitey was a little tanked. And maybe he didn't even realize he'd been bit. Or maybe the poison paralyzed him too quick."

"Cobra venom paralyzes you quick, does it?"

"Don't ask me. I'm only telling you what Andy used to say. Cobra bites go after your nerve centers. Rattlesnake bites go to work on your blood corpuscles and are slower. Maybe Whitey never even thought of the antivenin when King bit him. Drunk and excited and all, like he was."

"If he's a snake charmer and knows his business, the antivenin would be the first thing he'd think of, Cap."

"He didn't know his business so damn good," Capucino said. "He was still pretty new at it. He'd only been doing the Ram

Singh bit for a few days, remember."

Randall's yellow eyes narrowed. "What!" He sat forward in his chair.

"Sure. I told you. When Andy left the show last week—"

"You didn't say last week!"

"In Indianapolis, I said. Last week. Where Andy had King de-fanged. Didn't I tell you that?"

"Never mind," said Randall. "You told me now." He looked at Capucino curiously. To Capucino, the passage of time expressed itself only in the places where his traveling Carnival played. To him, Indianapolis meant last week. And Terre Haute probably meant the second week of August.

"Sure," Cap was saying, "that's when Whitey took over as Ram Singh. Last week in Indianapolis. That's why Andy got King de-fanged there, see?"

"Wait a minute." Randall tried to keep his irritation from showing. "You mean King has been de-fanged only since last week?"

"Sure. What did you think?"

"I thought Andy had him de-fanged when he started to train him, naturally. To make him safe to handle. Before he even joined your show."

Capucino laughed. "Oh, no. Andy didn't need him de-

fanged. Andy always milked him. He had him de-fanged to protect *Whitey* when he took over the act."

Randall had the curious feeling that he was slowly sinking out of sight in a morass of irrational facts that refused to allow him a secure hold on any of them. He made an effort and inquired, "Andy milked King?"

"Sure. Andy knew how to force King's jaws open and press out the poison from his poison sacs into a saucer, so he'd be without poison for long enough to be safe during the afternoon and evening performances. That's all milking is, drawing out the poison."

"That I know," said Randall sardonically. "But it's the only damn thing I do know about this whole mess, so far."

"Andy was a real snake man," Capucino said. "He milked the poison out of King every day instead of having him de-fanged, because he thought the sight of those big fangs in the front of King's mouth made the act that much better for the marks. They get a kind of morbid jolt out of seeing the fangs."

"So why didn't Andy show Whitey how to milk King when he took over?"

Capucino shrugged. "Too dangerous for the kid, he said."

"You're sure King really was de-fanged when Andy said so?"

Capucino stared at him, startled. "Why, I think so. You want to be absolutely sure, whyn't you ask Gloriana?"

"I will," Randall said.

Gloriana's trailer was an altogether different proposition from Whitey's. It was larger. Its interior was as frilly and feminine as the frosting on a pink birthday cake. When she wasn't visiting with Whitey, Gloriana shared it with three other female members of the Carnival troupe. And when Capucino led Randall up the steps and into the trailer, Gloriana's roommates were variously engaged in trying to comfort the grief-stricken acrobat.

Randall stood in the doorway while Capucino introduced him. He picked out Gloriana instantly, and after his first inclusive glance, he had eyes for no-one else. She was worth looking at. Even Capucino's enthusiastic description had failed to do her justice. She had tear stains on her cheeks; her face, innocent of make-up, had the clean, scrubbed look of a little girl's after a hot bath. Her short blonde hair was in disarray, her pale blue skirt was twisted over her swelling hips, and her pullover sweater had come adrift from its moorings

at her waist, exposing an inch-wide gap of milky white flesh. She was one of the most breathtakingly provocative women Randall had ever met.

At his request, her trailer-mates withdrew with Capucino, leaving him alone with Gloriana. She sat down on the daybed. Randall took a chair against the wall, trying not to look at the girl's legs.

"Mr. Capucino told me you might be able to give me a little information, Gloriana," he began. "You were pretty friendly with Ram Singh, the snake charmer, he tells me."

She nodded un-selfconsciously. "Yeah. Whitey and I got along." Her voice was breathless music.

"Capucino says there ~~was~~ a little more to it than just 'getting along'. Is that right?"

"That's right. Whitey was a doll. Is it a crime?" She was quickly defensive.

"No." He smiled at her. "I don't blame Whitey and you a bit."

She softened. "He was wonderful, Mr. Randall," she said. "I feel terrible to think he's gone. And how could it have happened? King had no fangs."

"Do you know he had no fangs? For sure, I mean?"

"Of course. Andy brought King home from the vet's and



showed King's mouth to both Whitey and me that same afternoon, so we'd know King was harmless."

"Why did Andy have King's fangs drawn?"

"So Whitey'd be safe putting on the act with King. Whitey was real new at the snake business. He was a ferris wheel operator before—" Her voice trailed off miserably and her eyes filled.

"I know all about that," Randall said hastily. "Did Whitey take care of King himself?"

"Yes. Andy always did, and he recommended Whitey do it, too. The snake will do his act better for the man who feeds him and takes care of him, Andy said."

Randall cleared his throat. "When you changed your affections from Grissom to Whitey, what did Grissom think about it?"

She wagged one incredibly graceful shoulder. "What did he think? He thought I was giving him a dirty deal at first."

"And weren't you?"

"Look here, Mr. Randall." The tears were out of her eyes now, replaced by a flash of independence. "I pick out my own boy friends. And who I pick out is nobody's business but mine. Andy had his time with me before I met Whitey."

"And he didn't carry a grudge when you left him?"

"Not after his first jealousy wore off."

"When did you shift from Andy to Whitey?"

"About three weeks ago, I guess. In Fort Wayne, it was."

"Only three weeks? Then it's perfectly possible, isn't it, that your change of boy friends had something to do with Andy's deciding to leave the Carnival?"

"It's possible, I suppose. But he'd been talking about leaving for a long time before I met Whitey. He wanted to get into something more dignified."

Randall said, watching her, "You'd be pretty hard to let go of, once a fellow had you."

"Thanks," she said, "if that's supposed to be a compliment."

"You say Andy didn't carry a grudge. How do you know?"

"He gave Whitey his snake, didn't he? For free? King was Andy's favorite possession, next to me." She giggled. "He told me he liked Whitey and that's why he wanted Whitey to take over his act when he left. He said if Whitey had a good job in the Carnival like that, maybe Whitey and me could get married."

"I see." Randall fidgeted in his chair. "When was the last time you saw Whitey alive?"

"Last night, just after the last side show performance. About eleven o'clock. I was going into the city for awhile, and I stopped off in the side show tent to tell Whitey about it."

"And you didn't go to his trailer after you got back from town?"

"No. It was pretty late. And Whitey needs his sleep. He usually takes a big dose of whiskey."

"Cap told me about that." Randall considered silently. On a hunch, he asked, "Did Grissom happen to tell you the name of the vet in Indianapolis who pulled King's fangs?"

Surprisingly, she nodded. "Yeah. A Dr. Sachs."

Randall wrote it down in a little notebook.

"How about Andy Grissom?"

Did he leave any address with you?"

"Sure," she said. "He's right here in this city, Mr. Randall. I had a date with him last night."

Randall, who thought he was used to surprises by now, almost did a double-take on this one. "You had a date with Grissom? Last night?"

"Why not? This is his home town. It's where he decided to settle down when he quit the Carnival last week. He's living at a boarding house on Spruce Street he told me. Mrs. Marion's."

"How come you have a date with him when you're Whitey's girl now?"

"I didn't want to," she said solemnly. "But he called up yesterday morning and asked me to come in and have a late supper with him after the show last night, just for old time's sake. What he really wanted, I found out, was to ask me how Whitey was getting along with King, and how I was getting along with Whitey." She looked deprecatingly at Randall, staring into his yellow eyes as innocent as a three-year-old in the Sunday school pageant.

"And you went?"

"Sure. I couldn't refuse him a little thing like that. He'd been nice to me, you know. And I still like him, for heaven's sake!"

In two days time, Randall thought morosely, she'll have forgotten all about Whitey. He wrote in his book: Mrs. Marion's. Spruce Street.

He got out of his chair. "Would you recognize King from any other snake?" he asked.

She shook her blonde head. "He's just a snake. I didn't look at him any more than I had to!"

Randall hesitated. "You've been very helpful," he said.

She rose from the daybed with the undulant grace of the acrobat she was. And you're kind of sweet for a policeman, Mr. Randall. You know that?" She moved toward him, every curve an invitation.

"Thanks," said Randall in confusion. He backed out the door.

He returned at once to Headquarters. By three-thirty that afternoon, he had accumulated these facts.

From Dr. Huneker, after post mortem examination: that Whitey Whitaker had, in fact, died of a snake bite on his right hand; that the snake almost certainly was a cobra, since the victim's symptoms were all neurotoxic; that Whitey had been bitten between midnight and one o'clock in the morning.

From the police laboratory: that the snake putatively guilty

of biting Whitey—brought from the Carnival lot to the lab, cooled to torpidity in the cold chamber, and then examined very gingerly by a technician—did, indeed, possess poison fangs capable of inflicting the fatal bite.

By long distance telephone: that Andy Grissom had paid an Indianapolis vet named Dr. E. L. Sachs to draw the fangs of a cobra called King, in order, as he made plain to the vet, to protect a new snake charmer who would be handling the snake.

From a Tri-state police broadcast: that no cobra had been reported lost, strayed or stolen within the past three days in the Tri-state area.

And from personal interviews: that Andy Grissom did, in fact, reside at the boarding house on Spruce Street; was planning to enter college in the Fall; had indubitably spent the hours between eleven and two A.M. the preceding night in a place called The Purple Angel, where he had met at eleven-thirty and had eaten supper with a girl enthusiastically described as "blonde, beautiful and stacked."

Contemplating this meager information without pleasure, Randall swore and lit a black cigar whose bitter taste and evil odor suited his mood. At 3:35

he left his office and walked two blocks to the public library.

There, for the first time, he became convinced beyond doubt that he was dealing with murder.

At four o'clock, he was asking Mrs. Marion, at the front door of her boarding house on Spruce Street, whether her lodger, Andy Grissom, was in. She said he was in his bedroom, would the gentleman like to go up? The gentleman would.

He found Grissom in a small cheerful room on the second floor. The former Ram Singh was, surprisingly, a slender, small-boned man with a thin, almost ascetic face, level blue eyes, a gentle voice, and an unruly shock of black hair. He was younger than Randall had pictured him, too—not more than twenty-six or seven.

Randall introduced himself. "May I come in, Mr. Grissom? I'd like to talk to you."

"What about?" asked Andy Grissom. He was cool.

"Your snake, King," Randall said.

"King!" In concern, Grissom held his door wider immediately, and Randall walked in. "Last night, Gloriana, a girl I know from the Carnival, said King was fine."

Randall sat down without invitation. "Nothing's happened

to King, Mr. Grissom. But something kind of permanent has happened to your friend, Whitey Whitaker."

Grissom shut the door and leaned back against it. "Whitey? Gloriana said he was great, too."

"He was. Until last night. Then your old buddy King bit him, and Whitey couldn't seem to keep from dying of it."

For a moment, Grissom seemed struck dumb. He stared at Randall with shock and incredulity in his level blue eyes. Randall, who was watching him closely, had to admit that incredulity seemed to predominate. Grissom finally sputtered, after several unsuccessful efforts to speak, "Whitey's dead?" He swallowed. "And King bit him? What are you trying to hand me, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing but the truth. Gloriana told Whitey she was coming in town to see you last night, Grissom. So after the show, he went to the trailer with your snake, put the basket down in its regular corner and turned in, feeling a little sorry for himself, no doubt. He took his usual jolt of whiskey, maybe more than usual to forget Gloriana's absence. But before he sacked out for good, he decided to say goodnight to the only companion he had left,

your snake. He lifted off the basket lid and King stuck his head out and struck at Whitey like in the climax of your act. Only this time Whitey's reactions are slowed down by liquor. He's standing too close to the snake, too, probably. Anyway, King bites him in the hand."

Grissom was slowly shaking his head. "Not King," he said in a positive voice. "Poor Whitey. He was a nice kid."

"Wasn't he? Nice enough to sweet-talk Gloriana away from your trailer to his. And you hated him for that, didn't you?"

"No. He took Gloriana away from me, sure. But I never did kid myself I was a permanent fixture with her. Evidently you've seen her, so you must know—"

"I have."

"So nuts," Grissom said. "What I want to tell you is that King couldn't have bitten Whitey. It was impossible. King doesn't have any fangs."

"Here we go again," Randall said ironically. "I know the touching story of how you took King to the vet's and had him de-fanged for Whitey's protection. I've talked to Dr. Sach's office about it on the phone."

"Well, then, you know I'm telling the truth. King couldn't bite." Grissom sat down quietly

on the edge of his neatly-made bed. "Were you asking Mrs. Marion about me earlier this afternoon?"

Randall nodded. "Yeah. And I know you weren't anywhere near the Carnival lot last night. When King bit Whitey."

"You keep saying King bit Whitey. Do you suspect that I had something to do with Whitey's death?"

"Maybe."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Grissom laughed, a gentle cascade of amusement. "Why didn't you say so? Aren't you reaching pretty far, Lieutenant? I did everything possible to protect Whitey. You've proved it. I made him a present of my girl and my snake and my act. And I had an alibi, it seems, for the time some strange snake bit Whitey and killed him." His eyes widened. "Say! How about my antivenin? I gave it to Whitey with the snake."

Randall's yellow eyes blazed briefly at Grissom. "Why didn't you teach Whitey to milk King, the way you did, instead of having him de-fanged?"

"Too dangerous for the kid. There's a trick to it. And the snake doesn't relish it much, of course."

Randall stood up, feeling defeated. "Will you come down to Headquarters and take a look at the snake that bit Whitey?"



"Sure, Lieutenant," Grissom agreed readily. "I'd like to see him. But I'm warning you in advance that it won't be King."

At the police laboratory in the basement of Headquarters building, Randall gestured to-

ward the pot-bellied basket the lab men had consigned to the farthest corner of the big room. The lid was wired down.

Grissom put on heavy leather gauntlets offered him by the lab man. "I wouldn't need these if it was King," he apologized. "He knows me. But with a strange snake—"

Without hesitation, he unwrapped the wire that held down the basket lid. Then he lifted the lid with one hand, stepped back, and began to whistle a shrill tune, trying to imitate the flute sound, Randall guessed.

Nothing happened.

"Still sluggish," the lab man hazarded, "from our cold treatment."

Grissom nodded and bent over the basket. With a sudden stab, he reached into the basket and brought out a foot and a half of snake, thick-bodied, dully shining, the evil head held away from him by a tight grip on the back of the snake's neck. Randall could see the reptile making a half-hearted attempt to expand his hood, but he was very sluggish.

Grissom turned the snake, this way and that, examining his markings. He looked up at Randall then, startled and bewildered.

"This is the snake that bit Whitey?" he asked tensely.

Randall nodded.

"But this is King!" Grissom exclaimed then, almost shouting. "This is my snake, Lieutenant! He couldn't have bitten Whitey!"

Grissom dropped the basket lid on the floor and brought his other hand around forcing open the snake's jaws. Plain to be seen were the two needle-like fangs, incurving, set at the forward end of the upper jawbone.

"I told you," said the lab man to Randall. "Fangs."

But Randall wasn't watching the snake's fangs. He was watching Grissom. And as Grissom exposed King's fangs to view, Randall could have sworn a Bible oath that the only sign of emotion detectable in the snake charmer's gentle blue eyes was a glimmer of amusement. *Amusement.*

Grissom dropped the snake back in the basket and clapped on the lid. He turned accusingly to Randall, then, saying in a heavy, dumfounded kind of way, "For God's sake, what is this, Lieutenant?" He held out a hand in appeal.

"I'll tell you," Lieutenant Randall said "Come on up to my office."

They went to Randall's office on the third floor and sat down, Randall behind his scarred desk, Grissom on the

edge of a straight chair opposite him. With a negligent movement of his hand behind the desk top, Randall switched on the little tape recorder he had arranged. Its mike was concealed very cleverly in the paper-piled "out-going" basket not far from Grissom's lips.

"I'll tell you what it is," Randall went on as though he had never paused at all. "You murdered Whitey, Grissom. Because he took Gloriana away from you. And you did it with a brand new weapon. Ignorance."

Grissom stared uncomprehendingly. "You said King killed him, Lieutenant."

"King did kill him. But only because you kept Whitey in ignorance of one little fact about poisonous snakes. A fact that hardly anybody but a herpetologist, or a snake charmer, would know. Not even the city veterinarian who takes care of dogs and cats for the most part. It was very clever of you." He waited.

Grissom was the picture of injured innocence. He said, "I don't need to sit here and take this kind of talk from you, Lieutenant. And you know it. But I want to know how King could bite Whitey when I had him de-fanged."

"I'll tell you that, too. I didn't know it myself until an

hour ago, but any poisonous snake has a number of extra fangs in reserve in case he breaks off a fang in capturing his prey." Randall's voice rose grimly "Or in case his good-hearted owner takes him to a vet and has his fangs pulled out to protect a trusting fool like Whitey.

"I can remember what the book said, Grissom, word for word: 'by the side of each functional fang is a series of new ones in different stages of development, hidden in special pockets of the mouth lining. As soon as a fang is lost or broken, one of the successional series moves into its place and is fused to the jawbone.'" He turned his yellow eyes on Grissom's blue ones. "You get the picture, don't you, Grissom?"

Grissom's mobile face expressed horrified disbelief. "You're kidding, Lieutenant!"

"Like King was kidding when he bit Whitey. Yeah."

"But that's fantastic! I can't believe it. You mean that after I had King's fangs drawn last week and told Whitey King was harmless, another new set of fangs grew in right away?"

Randall's tone was bitter. "Having King de-fanged was a deliberate deception on your part. You did it to give Whitey and Gloriana a false sense of security with the snake, set

them up for the kill. And you didn't give a damn whether it was Whitey or Gloriana that King bit after he got his new fangs. You hated them both. Didn't you?"

Grissom didn't seem to hear him. He dropped his face into his hands. "My God!" he said, agonized. "And I thought I was making sure Whitey couldn't get hurt!"

"You didn't know anything about this extra fang business, is that it?"

"Of course I didn't, man! What do you take me for?"

"A murderer," said Randall simply. "What else? By remote control you murdered the guy that stole your girl." If I'm ever going to get anything damaging out of him, he thought, this is about the time.

But Grissom merely shook his head, his face still covered by his hands. He wouldn't look at Randall. At length he mumbled, just above a whisper, "I didn't know, Lieutenant Randall. I give you my solemn word I didn't know that snakes can replace their fangs."

Randall lit one of his black cigars viciously. Did the guy know there was a recorder in the room?

He puffed his cigar. Then he gave it one more try, thinking he might prod Grissom into admitting something by insult-

ing him. He said in a quiet voice, "You knew about the fang replacement, Grissom. And you also know there's no way in the world I can prove it. So get out of my office, will you? You're stinking it up, scum. You're all yellow. I'm not a bit surprised that you arranged for a dumb, dirty brainless snake to do your killing for you. Get out Grissom, before I lose my temper and feed you to your own snake!"

Grissom's eyes were still mild, still bland, still contrite-looking. But Randall was sure he saw that spark of sardonic amusement in them again. Grissom stood up.

"If that's the way you feel, I'll go," he said mildly. "I've got to get in touch with Gloriana, anyway. She must be feeling pretty low about poor Whitey."

He put on his hat and turned toward the door. "And thanks for the snake lecture, Lieutenant. It's to learn exactly that kind of thing that I'm entering college this Fall. I don't want to be a square all my life, you know, like you."

He went out.

Randall blew acrid smoke from his mouth and slapped the tape-recorder switch shut in a fury.

Then he reached for his telephone. Capucino was eating

dinner in the restaurant tent on the carny lot, but he came to the phone at once. "Any news, Lieutenant?" he asked, his voice sounding very cheerful.

"What are you so happy about?" Randall barked at him.

Capucino chuckled. "I kinda tried my luck with Gloriana again after you left this morning," he said in his fast, fruity voice. "With Whitey gone, and Andy gone and all, I thought maybe she might be in a better mood, you know? And guess what?"

Randall sighed. "What?"

"She was. In a softer mood, I mean."

"Well, well. Congratulations, Cap. But watch yourself. Except for her, Whitey would still be alive."

"What's that?" Capucino said. "How come?"

Randall told him. Capucino listened in amazed silence. "I been in the carny business all my life," he finally said, "and I never heard that about a snake before."

"Neither did Grissom," said Randall. "He says."

"Don't you believe him!" Capucino was incensed. "He's a snake man! A specialist. He knew it, for sure. If he didn't it's funny as hell!"

"It's funny, all right," said Randall sourly. "Can't you hear me laughing?"



THE EYES OF MARCH

by LOUIS RILEY

Coldly, without pity, the voice came over the phone. "If it's cops, kid, it's bad. We may have to send you away. Far, far away..."

FOLLOWING his thirty-eighth murder, Karl Sheaffer decided to retire and move permanently to the West Coast. The dry ice in his blood was beginning to thaw, and on his last three contracts he'd actually experienced a slight pang of sympathy at the terror-ridden expressions on his victims' faces.

When you are a professional gunman and start feeling emotions on a job of work, it is time to quit. There is no place for sententious meandering when the name of the game is murder for hire. If you have a cold-blooded task to perform, you have to do it without the rationalization of indulging in personal religion or

moral ethics. And so Sheaffer, realizing this, had resigned from the organization.

But now, as he prepared to vacate the hostile climatic environment of the Midwest, something else was bugging him. And he was sure he knew what it was. Or was he?

It was the middle of March, and an icy rain lashed against Sheaffer's apartment window as he parted the red drapes to regard the dismal street scene three stories below. This was a raw Monday morning in Chicago, and he could see people with those back-to-work blues waiting for buses—some huddled together in deference to the cold wet wind, coat collars up and heads scrunched down.

But Karl Sheaffer wasn't interested in the rat race. Instead, his attention was focused on a solitary man he saw standing in a doorway of the furniture store across the street, and he eyed this figure closely. The man wasn't the same one he'd seen before, he mused—a trifle apprehensively—although he did look vaguely familiar.

They must be working in shifts, now. Twenty-four hours a day. He'd known all along they'd watch him for a while, but not so intensely. Not around the clock, at any rate. With a scowl, he drew the curtain shut again and went into the kitchenette.

Fresh from the shower, he was still clad in a white terrycloth robe, with imported Italian sandals on his feet. He sniffed at the pleasant aroma in the small kitchen. The coffee was fully perked now, so he poured himself a cup, then sat down at the little formica-topped breakfast table to smoke a cigarette and sip thoughtfully at the hot, steaming liquid.

Why, he wondered, were they still watching him?

Sheaffer was a tall, raw-boned man of forty-three, not really handsome, but not overtly unattractive, either. His eyes were a smoky gray, his chin squared beneath a determined jaw, his black hair close-cropped and distinctively white at the temples. He looked capable of being very tough if need be—and, of course, he was.

But toughness was not enough when you were a hit man quitting the business. Toughness could not stop a red hot slug.

Sheaffer smoked and thought. Maybe if he told them he'd put away a big whistle with an automatic blower just in case? Some incriminating evidence? No, not hardly. They knew him better. He was no fink.

Vince Collins had told him he could get out any time he wanted to. All he had to do was keep the Word. Hell, if a man had made enough money in the

business and wanted to retire, why, more power to him. It left work for younger men on their way in the organization.

"You want to quit?" Vince Collins had said. "Well, that's all right with us. Just keep your mouth shut and don't-repeat, *don't*-write anything down." Collins had then shook hands with him and wished him good luck. "Send us one of those sexy postcards when you get settled."

And he, Sheaffer, had expected them to keep an eye on him for a time. But damn, nothing like this.

He decided to call Vince Collins and ask him what the score was. Tell him to get off his back. Tell him to call off his dogs, or else. Or else what? He knows I don't have any evidence. Nothing tangible, anyhow. Not the way all the contracts had been set up. What, then?

The-hell with it! I'm not going to be looking over my shoulder the rest of my life! I'll call him and tell him to shoot or put away his guns!

Angrily, Sheaffer snubbed the cigarette out in an overflowing ashtray. Then, picking up his cup he carried it into the living room, set it down near the phone on the coffee table, sat down on the red leather sofa, picked up the instrument and dialed a number.

"Hello, Franky?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Sheaffer. Vince up yet?"

"Oh, hi yuh, Shafe. Yeah; he's up, I think. Anything important?"

"Something personal, Franky."

"Oh. Okay. Hold the line a minute."

"Right on." Sheaffer drummed nervous fingers on the glass-topped table as he waited.

Then: "Hello, Sheaffer?"

"Yeah, it's me, Vince. 'Get you up?'"

"Naw. Hell, I'm up an hour already. Been reading yesterday's funny papers. Man, that Mutt and Jeff really tickle me. Say, boy, how's the retired life going? You about ready to leave for the Coast? How's it going with you?"

"It would go a lot better if you would call off your hounds."

There was a cough at the other end, then: "What hounds, already?"

"The people you got watching me."

"What's with you Shafe? You cracking up, or something? I got nobody watching you. Oh, sure we kept an eye on you for a few days just as a matter of form, you know. But your record is clean and we realize you've been a top performer in the past. You've been thoroughly screened and given the okay to blow. We know you ain't got a big mouth,

and so that's the way we voted on the matter last Tuesday. So as long as you keep the Word, you're free to do as you please."

"I appreciate all that, Vince, but still, there's sure as hell somebody watching me."

"Well, it ain't any of us, Shafe. Say, you don't suppose it could be any kind of Blue, do you?"

"I don't see how. I've never even seen the inside, let alone have a record."

"Ah, yeah. Um, kind of watch yourself on the phone, pal. I've taken precautions, of course, as the Professor might say—but you never know. Some telephone lines can get themselves insectified overnight."

"I hear you. What do you think I should do?"

"Are you sure they're watching you?"

"Positive."

"They tailing you or something?"

"No, they haven't been following me. But then again, I haven't gone anywhere for the past few days. They just stand in doorway across the street."

"Oh, hell, Shafe! They must be some private agency checking up on someone else. You know—some divorce outfit, or something."

"No. These guys are watching me, Vince. Every time I look out the window one of them is there,

and now they're working around the clock."

"I told you boy; they're probably watching someone else."

"No. Like I said, every time I look out the window the guy will look directly up at me and then turn his head away. Vince, I know when I'm being cased! I didn't just get off the boat!"

"I know that, Shafe. But I'd still lay eight to five they're watching someone else. Tell me, can you make any of them out?"

"No. Well, that is, not exactly. There is something familiar about the bird out there now, but I can't pin it down. Like I might have seen him before, somewhere. You know—"

"Yeah. I see people like that all the time. And nine out of ten you did see them before, or at least someone like them for just a short time and it hangs in your mind, or something."

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

"Vince, you didn't answer my question."

"What question was that, already?"

"What do you think I should do?"

"Umm. Well, I guess since you think you've seen this guy before, I suppose we better take a hand with the schmock. I think you should stay right where

you're at for the time being. You're at home, ain't you?"

"Right."

"Okay. Now, where's this guy at?"

"On the Washington Avenue side. In the doorway of the furniture store across the street."

"What's he look like?"

Sheaffer described the watcher.

"Okay again, friend. Now, you sit tight. I'm going to send a couple of the boys around to take a look at him, and if we can make him out as Blue we'll let you know. But let me tell you something, boy, if he is Blue, and he is watching you, it could be bad for you. We might have to send you away. Far, far away."

"I hear you, and I'm hep."

"Okay. But I wouldn't worry. He's probably some kind of bum. We'll handle it. We'll look him over and let you know what we find."

"Good, Vince. I'll be waiting."

Sheaffer hung up the phone and smiled grimly to himself as he sipped at his cooled coffee and then lit another cigarette. He was sure Collins was telling him straight, as there was no reason for the syndicate boss to lie about it. If they had intentions of clobbering him, they'd have done it earlier without scaring him up with round-the-clock watchers.



So who in the hell was it?

Blue? Blue was the criminal argot for lawmen. All lawmen Federal, State, County and local. Could the watchers be Blue? No hardly. Sheaffer had never been arrested, never had his picture taken and his fingerprints were on file nowhere. So the police had no inkling of even his existence.

Or did they? There was a remote possibility. There could have been a leak somewhere. That had to be the only answer. Since the shadows were not from the organization, the only solution was that they were Blue. Somehow, somewhere, they'd gotten some kind of line on him.

But how, for Christ's sake?

Sheaffer rose from the divan and returned to the window. Parting the drapes slightly with his fingers, he peered down at the man standing in the cold damp doorway. As he watched

he man suddenly gazed straight up at him and Sheaffer hurriedly let the curtain fall back.

He's watching *me* all right, the retired killer thought. He peeked out again. The fellow stood stock still with his hands in his gray overcoat pockets, the brim of his gray hat tugged down low over his eyes. Even at this distance Sheaffer had the eerie sensation that he'd seen him somewhere before.

But where?

Karl Sheaffer jerked the cord aside, and the tapestry flew wide open. He stood, arms akimbo, and stared challengingly down at the man in the doorway. Let him see me, he thought. Let him know I know he's there!

The man glanced up at him momentarily, then quickly turned his face away.

"Maybe I shouldn't have done that," Sheaffer muttered aloud. Now that Vince was going to take a hand he didn't want to scare the creep off before the syndicate could get a look at him.

He covered the window again and went out to pour another cup of coffee. Next, he returned to the living room and switched on the color television just in time to catch the eight o'clock news.

Sheaffer regarded the neglected cigarette burning between his fingers, flicked off an inch of

ashes and lit another from the glowing butt. Almost immediately he snubbed it out, took another gulp of coffee, turned off the set and then retraced his steps to the window.

The man was still there!

At twenty minutes after eight Sheaffer watched as an inconspicuous green sedan appeared on Washington Avenue and carefully threaded its way through the heavy traffic. As they cruised slowly by, Sheaffer recognized the pallid countenance of Shark Waters—he'd seen him before on a job in Kansas City—but the other man, the driver, was unfamiliar to him. They braked almost to a stop as they looked casually over at the furniture store, then, there being no place to park, they moved slowly on.

In another minute or two they were back, having rounded the block, and once more they slowed as they passed the store.

Sheaffer eyed the man in the doorway as the organization car went by. The fellow didn't even realize he was being cased. He just stood there in the same position, occasionally casting an eye up at the crack in the curtain.

Shark Waters and his partner made one more pass and then drove off into the cold wet morning.

Sheaffer relaxed a bit. Now he

would find out something. He looked at the ornate clock on the mantel of the imitation fireplace and saw that it was eight thirty-two. He should be hearing from Vince Collins around nine.

He sloshed his coffee into the kitchen sink, rinsed the cup, set it on the sideboard to dry and then created himself a stiff highball. Swirling the ice and amber liquid around in the glass, he went back to the window and looked out again.

The man, of course, was still there. But say—wait a minute! Sheaffer's eyes widened as he saw another man—this one in a blue topcoat and a green Alpine fedora—walk up to the man in the doorway and begin talking to him! Now, the newcomer nodded, then they both looked up at the window where Sheaffer almost dropped his drink as he quickly jerked the curtain shut all the way.

Now, who, in the hell is this one?

His hand trembling slightly, he set the whiskey and soda down on a nearby stereo and returned to the window. The man in gray had disappeared now, and the one in the jaunty hat and blue coat had evidently taken up the former's position.

"A new shift," Sheaffer muttered in a bitter undertone. He looked closely at this latest watchdog. He did not recognize

him, but then again, there was something about his close-legged slightly hunched stance. . .

In his mind's eye, Kar Sheaffer reviewed different syndicate men he'd run across in the last ten or eleven years. But there were so many of them he'd just had slight connection with in different cities that it was hard to remember.

Could Vince Collins be lying after all? Was he being set up as a target? Yet, even if it were true, which it couldn't be, the organization never operated this way. The party to be hit never even realized he'd been fingered, let alone be conspicuously watched beforehand.

In the majority of cases, all information concerning the target's habits came from one of his trusted friends—the finger. Once the victim is on the spot it is up to the hitter to take over. This killer studies all data left to him, usually in an envelope he picks up in the local airport locker-room, and then quietly goes about his business. The guy never knows what he's got coming until a moment or so before it happens.

So why all this—watching? These people just had to be fuzz! The criminal organization simply does not operate this way!

Sheaffer dropped the magenta drapes once more and retrieved his drink. All he could do now

was wait for the call from Vince Collins.

It came at ten minutes after nine.

"Hello?"

"Sheaffer?"

"Yeah, it's me, Vince. Did they make him?"

"Well, no, not exactly, Shafe. You see. . ."

"They didn't make him?" Sheaffer cut in. "They didn't? Look here, Vince there's a new one out there now. So forget the first one. This guy relieved the one that was out there before."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I was watching when he relieved the earlier man. They both looked up at my window. Maybe your boys can make this bird out."

"Well, maybe." Then: "Okay, Shafe. You sit tight. I'll send the boys around again. This new guy, is he in the same place? You know, where you said before?"

"Yeah. In the doorway of the furniture store across the street from me, on Washington."

"Okay, We'll check him out. You sit tight like I told you."

"Thanks, Vince. I'll be watching."

Sheaffer hung up the phone, then went to the kitchenette to turn on the burner and re-heat the coffee. Lighting a new cigarette, he entered his bedroom and shucked off his robe. He donned fresh, clean underwear,

argyle socks, and then pulled on a sharp-creased pair of light tan winter slacks. A bright yellow sport shirt he buttoned all the way up to the neck and then stuffed the tails into the beltless pants.

Back in the bedroom again he opened a dresser drawer, extracted his forty-five and checked it out, working the mechanism a couple of times. He replaced the ejected slugs into the clip, slammed the works home with a solid clack and then hefted the weapon a few times before putting it back in its resting place, silently hoping he'd never have to use it again.

He sat on the bed and pushed his gaily colored stockinged feet into a pair of ox-blood moccasins that bore a highly polished glow. Next, he selected an expensive dark brown sports jacket from the closet and put it on. Buttoning it, he regarded his reflection in the full-length mirror and figured he looked like a well-to-do man-about-town. Turning back to the closet, he brought out a handsome beige-colored topcoat, brushed off some imaginary lint and laid it across the bed.

Suddenly sniffing at the atmosphere, Sheaffer hurried back to the kitchen to shut off the scalding coffee. Pouring the burnt remains into the sink, he rinsed out the pot—washing the



grounds down the drain—then went to build himself another drink. As he sampled the liquor, he thought: *The boys ought to be back about now.*

And he was right. As he parted the curtain Sheaffer had seen the green sedan coming slowly down the street. The new watcher was still at his post, hands in pockets, collar up and sporty hat down over his eyes. And that odd, close-footed stance... Just where had he seen this bastard before?

This time there was a place to park across from the furniture store doorway, so the syndicate automobile glided smoothly into the space and stopped. The pasty-faced Shark Waters and his partner sat in the car quietly for a while, and Sheaffer watched as the man in the doorway patently ignored them.

After a few more minutes had elapsed, Waters and his abnormally tall companion got out of the car and approached the apartment building entrance. At the doorway they paused, took one more look across the street and then came in.

They're coming up to see me, Sheaffer thought. Good. Maybe they've recognized him. At least, I sure as hell hope so!—He let the drape fall back in place and waited impatiently for the knock on his door.

And when it came it was very discreet, barely audible. Karl Sheaffer opened the door wide and admitted the deadly looking duo. The smooth, alabaster countenance of Shark Waters grinned crookedly at him and then the hood nodded, a little soberly.

"Sheaffer," he said, his voice a metallic rasp, "this is Goldberg. He more or less handles all our union affairs."

"Glad to know you," Sheaffer said, shaking the towering gangster's clammy hand. He turned back to Waters. "Well," he asked, "did you guys make out who that monkey is down there?"

Shark Waters did not answer. Instead, he crossed the room to the window, pulled the drapes aside and stared down through the cold rain.

Sheaffer came up behind him and looked over his shoulder.

"See the bastard?" he said. "Look at the brazen sonofabitch! He's looking directly up here at us!"

Waters nodded grimly and then pulled the curtain shut. He looked at Sheaffer.

"This is some very bad business, Shafe," he said.

"You mean you recognize him?"

Waters shrugged his bony shoulders. "Maybe, maybe not. I don't know, yet. But I do know he's bad business. I'll tell you what, pal; I got to call Vince about this. And, no offence to you, but since you're retired and no longer with us, I want you to step into the bedroom with Goldberg and shut the door while I make the call."

"That's all right with me, friend," Sheaffer said. "I don't want to hear anything anyhow. Just so long as you get these bastards off my back."

"We might be able to do that, Shafe."

Sheaffer and Goldberg went into the bedroom and closed the door. Waters studied the blank paneling of the door for a moment, then went over and looked out the window once more. With a serious look on his chalky face, he pulled the blinds shut again and came over to the sofa.

He sat down, picked up the phone and dialed Vince Collins's number.

"Hello!"

"Franky?"

"Yeah."

"Shark. Put Vince on."

"Stand by."

In another few seconds Vince

Collins came on the line. "Shark?"

"Yeah. Listen, Vince, we've got some real bad business over here at Sheaffer's."

"So what's the problem already? Is the eyeballer Blue?"

"No, nothing like that. Blue we can handle. This is something else."

"Well, what in the hell is it?"

"It's like I told you I suspected when we were over here earlier this morning. You know, about the little man who wasn't there? Our boy is as nutty as Planters and as crazy as Harpo. He's seeing a man in a doorway that just ain't there."

"No man?"

"No man. Sheaffer's over the blue wall."

"I'll be go to hell! Well, if he's seeing things, we can't afford to let him run loose. It's too bad. I liked Shafe; you know what to do."

Sitting nervously in a chair, Karl Sheaffer watched as the bedroom door opened and the impassive, ashen-faced Shark Waters stood there in the opening. He stared in wide-eyed horror at the silencer on the gun in Waters' hand. And just before the first muffled shot sounded he remembered where he'd seen the men in the doorway before.

A little over ten years ago they had been some of his first victims.

THE DEATH OF A BUM

by DONALD WESTLAKE

"A man's alive and now he's dead," Levine said. "That's the only reason why a murderer must be caught."



DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES



For a long time Mr. Donald Westlake has been a leading and valued contributor to both the magazine, hard cover and paperback fields. His writing style, underplayed but with great emotional impact, has been greatly admired by readers and editors alike. The present story, "The Death of a Bum," is a perfect example of his deceptively laconic style, with an ending that is both unusual and strong. It is a pleasure indeed to include this tale in our Department of Lost Stories. From time to time, in this magazine, you will see this department. When you do, read with care and discrimination. You will be reading a story which, whatever its length, whatever its field, has been remembered and revered as too good to be forgotten. It is a very special treat we bring you this month. Donald Westlake was always one of the best, and this story is one of his finest. Read it. You won't forget it for a long time.

THE EDITORS

ABRAHAM LEVINE of Brooklyn's Forty-Third Precinct sat at his desk in the squadroom and wished Jack Crawley would get well soon. Crawley, his usual tour partner, was in the hospital recovering from a bullet in the leg, and Levine was working now with a youngster recently assigned to the squad, a college graduate named Andy Stettin. Levine liked the boy—though he sometimes had the feeling Stettin was picking his brains.

Abraham Levine was a short and stocky man, baggily dressed from plain pipe racks, the lines

of his body all softened within his brown suit, making him look chunkier and flabbier than he really was. His hair was pepper-and-salt gray, clipped stiff and short in a military crewcut. His face was round and soft, with mild eyes and a formless nose and a broad sensitive mouth, all bracketed by faint fine lines like a pencil sketch. He was fifty-three years old.

He was sitting now at the desk, thinking about Jack Crawley, when the telephone rang. He answered, saying, "Forty-Third Precinct. Levine."

It was a woman's voice, middle-aged, very excited. "There's a man been murdered! You've got to come right away!"

Levine pulled pencil and paper close, then said, "Your name, please?"

"There's been a murder! Don't you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. May I have your name, please?"

"Mrs. Francis Temple. He's lying right upstairs."

"The address, please?"

"One ninety-eight Third Street. I told all this to the other man, I don't see—"

"And you say there's a dead man there?"

"He's been shot! I just went in to change the linen, and he was lying there!"

"Someone will be there right away."

He hung up as she was starting another sentence, and looked up to see Stettin, a tall athletic young man with dark-rimmed glasses and a blond crewcut, standing by the door, already wearing his coat.

"Just a second," Levine said, and dialed for Mulvane, on the desk downstairs. "This is Abe. Did you just transfer a call from Mrs. Francis Temple to my office?"

"I did. The beat car's on the way."

"All right. Andy and I are taking it."

Levine cradled the phone and got to his feet. He went over and took his coat from the rack and shrugged into it, then followed the impatient Stettin downstairs to the car.

That was another thing. Crawley had always driven the Chevy. But Stettin drove too fast, was too quick to hit the siren and rush through busy intersections. So now Levine had to do the driving, a chore he didn't enjoy.

The address was on a block of too ornate nineteenth-century brownstones, now all converted either into furnished apartments or boarding houses. One ninety-eight was furnished apartments, and Mrs. Francis Temple was its landlady.

She was waiting on the top step of the stoop, wringing her hands, a buxom fiftyish woman in a black dress and open black sweater, a maroon knit shawl over her head to keep out the cold.

The prowling car was double-parked in front of the house, and Levine braked the Chevy to a stop behind it.

He and Stettin climbed out, crossed the sidewalk, and went up the stoop.

Mrs. Temple was on the verge of panic. Her hands kept washing each other, she kept shifting her weight back and forth from one foot to the other, and she stared

bug-eyed as the detectives came up the stoop toward her.

"Are you the police?" she demanded, her voice shrill.

Levine dragged out his wallet, showed her the badge. "Are the patrolmen up there?"

She nodded, stepping aside to let him move past her. "I went in to change the linen, and there he was, lying in the bed, all covered with blood. It was terrible, terrible."

Levine went on in, Stettin after him, and Mrs. Temple brought up the rear, still talking. Levine interrupted her to ask, "Which room?"

"The third floor front," she said, and went back to repeating how terrible it had been when she'd gone in there and seen him on the bed, covered with blood.

Stettin was too eager for conscious politeness. He bounded on up the maroon-carpeted stairs, while Levine plodded up after him, the woman one step behind all the way, the shawl still over her head.

One of the patrolmen was standing in the open doorway at the other end of the third-floor hall. As was usual in this type of brownstone, the upper floors consisted of two large rooms rented separately, each with a small kitchen but both sharing the same bath. The dead man was in the front room.

Levine said to the woman,



"Wait out here, please," nodded to the patrolman, and went on through into the room.

Stettin and the second patrolman were over to the right, by the studio couch, talking together. Their forms obscured Levine's view of the couch as he came through the doorway, and he got the feeling, as he had more than once with the energetic Stettin, that he was Stettin's assistant rather than the other way around.

Which was ridiculous, of course. Stettin turned, clearing Levine's view, saying, "How's it look to you, Abe?"

The studio couch had been opened up and was now in its other guise, that of a linen-covered bed. Between the sheets the corpse lay peaceably on its back with the covers tucked up

around its throat. Its arms were outside the sheets and rested stiffly on its chest.

Levine came over and stood by the bed, looking down at it. The bullet had struck the bridge of the nose, smashing bone and cartilage, and discoloring the flesh around it. There was hardly any nose left. The mouth hung open, and the top front teeth had been jarred partially out of their sockets by the force of the bullet.

The slain man had bled profusely, and the pillow and the turned-down sheet around his throat were drenched with blood.

The top blanket was blue, and was now scattered with smallish chunks of white stuff. Levine reached down and picked up one of the white chunks, feeling it between his fingers.

"Potato," he said, more to himself than to the cop at his side.

Stettin said, "What's that?"

"Potato. That stuff on the bed. He used a potato for a silencer."

Stettin smiled blankly. "I don't follow you, Abe."

Levine moved his hands in demonstration as he described what he meant. "The killer took a raw potato, and jammed the barrel of the gun into it. Then, when he fired, the bullet smashed through the potato,

muffling the sound. It's a kind of home-made silencer."

Stettin nodded, and glanced again at the body. "Think it was a gang killing, then?"

"I don't know," Levine replied, frowning. He turned to the patrolman. "What have you got?"

The patrolman dragged a flat black notebook out of his hip pocket, and flipped it open. "He's the guy that rented the place. The landlady identified him. He gave his name as Maurice Gold."

Excited, Stettin said, "Morry Gold?" He came closer to the bed, squinting down at the face remnant as though he could see it better that way. "Yeah, by God, it is," he said, his expression grim. "It was a gang killing, Abe!"

"You know him?"

"I saw him once. On the lineup downtown, maybe—two months ago."

Levine smiled thinly. Leave it to Stettin, he thought. Most detectives considered the lineup a chore and a waste of time, and grumbled every time their turn came around to go downtown and attend. The lineup was supposed to familiarize the precinct detectives with the faces of known felons, but it took a go-getter like Stettin to make the theory work.

Levine had been attending the

lineup twice a month for fifteen years and hadn't once recognized one of the felons later on.

Stettin was turning his head this way and that, squinting at the body again. "Yeah, sure," he said. "Morry Gold. He had a funny way of talking—a cockney accent, maybe. That's him; all right."

"What was he brought in for?"

"Possession of stolen goods. He was a fence. I remember the Chief talking to him. I guess he'd been brought in lots of times before."

Stettin shook his head. "Apparently he managed to wriggle out of it."

The patrolman said, "He'd have been much better off if he hadn't."

"A falling out among thieves," said Stettin. "Think so, Abe?"

"It could be." To the patrolman, Levine said, "Anything else?"

"He lived here not quite two years. That's what the landlady told me. She found him at quarter after four, and the last time she saw him alive was yesterday, around seven o'clock in the evening. He went out then. He must have come back some time after eleven o'clock, when the landlady went to bed. Otherwise, she'd have seen him come in." He grinned without

humor. "She is one of those!"

"I'll go talk to her." Levine looked over at the body again, and averted his eyes. An old English epitaph flickered through his mind: *As you are, so was I; as I am, so you will be.* Twenty-four years as a cop hadn't hardened him to the tragic and depressing finality of death, and in the last few years, as he had moved steadily into the heart-attack age range and as the inevitability of his own end had become more and more real to him, he had grown steadily more vulnerable to the dread implicit in the sight of death.

He turned away, saying, "Andy, give the place a going-over. Address books, phone numbers, somebody's name in the flyleaf of a book. You know the kind of thing."

"Sure." Stettin glanced around, eager to get at it. "Do you think he'd have any of the swag here?"

The word sounded strange on Stettin's tongue, odd and archaic. Levine smiled, as the death-dread wore off, and said, "I doubt it. Stick around here for the ME and technical crew. Get the time of death and whatever else they can give you."

"Sure thing."

MRS. FRANCIS TEMPLE was still outside in the hall, jabbering now at the second

patrolman, who was making no attempt to hide his boredom. Levine took her away, much to the patrolman's relief, and they went downstairs to her cellar apartment, the living room of which was Gay Nineties from end to end, from the fringed beaded lampshades to the marble porcelain vases on the ornate mantle.

In these surroundings, Mrs. Temple's wordiness switched from the terrible details of her discovery of the body to the nostalgic details of her life with her late husband, who had been a newspaperman.

Levine, by main force, wrestled the conversation back to the present, in order to ask his questions about Maurice Gold.

"What did he do for a living," he asked. "Do you know?"

"He said he was a salesman. Sometimes he was gone nearly a week at a time."

"Do you know what he sold?"

She shook her head. "There were never any samples or anything in his room," she said. "I would have noticed them." She shivered suddenly, hugging herself, and said, "What a terrible thing. You don't know what it was like, to come into the room and see him—"

Levine thought he knew. He thought he knew better than Mrs. Temple. He said, "Did he

have many visitors? Close friends, that you know about?"

"Well— There were two or three men who came by sometimes in the evenings. I believe they played cards."

"Do you know their names?"

"No, I'm sorry. I really didn't know Mr. Gold very well—not as a friend. He was a very close-mouthed man." One hand fluttered to her lips. "Oh, listen to me. The poor man is lying dead, and listen to me talking about him."

"Did anyone else ever come by?" Levine persisted. "Besides these three men he played cards with."

She shook her head. "Not that I remember. I think he was a lonely man. Lonely people can recognize one another, and I've been lonely, too, since Alfred died. These last few years have been difficult for me, Mr. Levine."

It took Levine ten minutes to break away from the woman gently, without learning anything more.

"We'd like to try to identify his card-playing friends," he said. "Would you have time to come look at pictures this afternoon?"

"Well, yes, of course. It was a terrible thing, Mr. Levine, an absolutely terrible—"

"Yes, ma'am."

Levine escaped, to find Stettin coming back downstairs,

loose-limbed and athletic. Feeling a little bit guilty at palming the voluble Mrs. Temple off on his partner, Levine said, "Take Mrs. Temple to look at some mug shots, will you? Known former acquaintances of Gold—or anyone she recognizes. She says there were two or three men who used to come here to play cards."

"Will do." Stettin paused at the foot of the steps. "Uh, Abe," he said, "we don't have to break our humps over this one, do we?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well—" Stettin shrugged, and nodded his head at the stairs. "He was just a bum, you know. A small-time crook. The world's better off without him."

"He was alive," said Levine. "And now he's dead."

"Okay, okay. For Pete's sake, I wasn't saying we should forget the whole thing—just that we shouldn't break our humps over it."

"We'll do our job," Levine told him, "just as though he'd had the keys to the city and money in fifty-seven banks."

"Okay. You didn't have to get sore, Abe."

"I'm not sore. Take Mrs. Temple in the car. I'm going to stay here a while and ask some more questions. Mrs. Temple's in her apartment there."

"Okay."



"Oh, by the way. When you get out to the car, call in and have somebody get us the dope on that arrest two months ago. Find out if you can whether there was anybody else involved, and if by chance the arresting officer knows any of Gold's friends. Anything like that."

"Will do."

Levine went on upstairs to ask questions.

The other tenants knew even less than Mrs. Temple. Levine was interrupted for a while by a reporter, and by the time he'd finished questioning the tenants it was past four o'clock, and late enough for him to go off duty. He phoned the precinct, and then went on home.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING he arrived at the precinct at eight o'clock for his third and last day-shift on this cycle.

Stettin was already there, sitting at Levine's desk and looking through a folder. He leaped to his feet, grinning and ebullient as ever, saying, "Hiya, Abe. We got us some names."

"Good."

Levine eased himself into his chair, and Stettin hovered over him, opening the folder. "The arresting officer was a Patrolman Michaels, out of the Thirtieth. I couldn't find out why the charge didn't stick, because Michaels was kind of touchy about that. I guess he made some kind of procedural goof."

"But anyhow, he gave me some names. Gold has a brother, Abner, who runs a pawnshop in East New York. Michaels says Gold was a kind of go-between for his brother. Morry would buy the stolen goods, cache it, and then transfer it to Abner's store."

Levine nodded. "Anything else?"

"Well, Gold took one fall, about nine years ago. He was caught accepting a crate full of stolen furs. The thief was caught with him." Stettin pointed to a name and address. "That's him—Elly Kapp. Kapp got out last year, and that's his last known address."

"You've been doing good work," Levine told him. He grinned up at Stettin and said, "Been breaking your hump?"

Stettin grinned back, in embarrassment. "I can't help it," he said. "You know me, old Stettin Fetchit."

Levine nodded. He'd heard Stettin use the line before. It was his half-joking apology for being a boy on the way up, surrounded by stodgy plodders like Abe Levine.

"Okay," said Levine. "Anything from Mrs. Temple?"

"One positive identification, and a dozen maybes. The positive is a guy named Sal Casetta. He's a small-time bookie."

Levine got to his feet. "Let's go talk to these three," he said. "The brother first."

Twenty-two minutes later they were in the East New York pawnshop. Abner Gold was a stocky man with thinning hair and thick spectacles. He was also—once Levine had flashed the police identification—very nervous.

"Come into the office," he said. "Please, please. Come into the office."

Levine noticed that the thick accent Gold had worn when they'd first come in had suddenly vanished.

Gold unlocked the door to the cage, relocked it after them, and led the way back past the bins to his office, a small and crowded room full of ledgers. There was a rolltop desk, a metal

filing cabinet and four sagging leather chairs.

"Sit down, sit down," he said. "You've come about my brother."

"You've been notified?"

"I read about it in the *News*. A terrible way to hear, believe me."

"I'm sure it must be," Levine said.

He hesitated. Usually, Jack Crawley handled the questioning, while Levine observed silently from a corner. But Jack was still laid up with the bad leg, and Levine wasn't sure Stettin, eager though he might be, would know the right questions or how to ask them. So it was up to him.

Levine sighed, and said, "When was the last time you saw your brother, Mr. Gold?"

Gold held his hands out to the sides, in a noncommittal shrug. "A week ago? Two weeks?"

"You're not sure."

"I think two weeks. You must understand, my brother and I—we'd drifted apart."

"Because of his trouble with the law?"

Gold nodded. "A part of it, yes. God rest his soul, Mister—?"

"Levine."

"Yes. God rest his soul, Mister Levine, but I must tell you what's in my heart. You have to know the truth. Maurice was not a good man. Do you understand me? He was my brother, and

now he's been murdered, but still I must say it. His life went badly for him, Mr. Levine, and he became sour. When he was young—" He shrugged again. "He became very bitter, I think. He lost his belief."

"His faith, you mean?"

"Oh, that, too. Maurice was not a religious man. But even more than that, do you follow me? He lost his *belief*. In the goodness of man—in *life*. Do you understand me?"

"I think so." Levine watched Gold's face carefully. Stettin had said that the brothers had worked together in the buying and selling of stolen goods, but Abner Gold was trying very hard to convince them of his own innocence. Levine wasn't sure yet whether or not he could be convinced.

"The last time you saw him," he said, "did he act nervous at all? As though he was expecting trouble?"

"Maurice always expected trouble. But I do know what you mean. No, nothing like that, nothing more than his usual pessimism."

"Do you yourself know of any enemies he might have made?"

"Ever since I read the article in the paper, I've been asking myself exactly that question. Did anyone hate my brother enough to want to kill him. But I can

think of no one. You must understand me, I didn't know my brother's associates. We—drifted apart.”

“You didn't know any of his friends at all?”

“I don't believe so, no.”

“Not Sal Casetta?”

“An Italian? No, I don't know him.” Gold glanced at Stettin, then leaned forward to say to Levine, “Excuse me, do you mind? Could I speak to you alone for a moment?”

“Sure,” said Stettin promptly. “I'll wait outside.”

“Thank you. Thank you very much.” Gold beamed at Stettin until he left, then leaned toward Levine again. “I can talk to you,” he said. “Not in front of the other policeman.”

Levine frowned, but said nothing.

“Listen to me,” said Gold. His eyes were dark, and deepset. “Maurice was my brother. If anyone has the right to say what I am going to say now it is me, the brother. Maurice is better dead. Better for everyone. The police are shorthanded, I know this. You have so much work; forget Maurice. No one wants vengeance. Listen to me, I am his brother. Who has a better right to talk?”

You're talking to the wrong man, Levine thought. *Stettin's the one thinks your way.* But he kept quiet, and waited.

Gold paused, his hands out as though in offering, presenting his ideas to Levine. Then he lowered his hands and leaned back and said, — “You understand me. That's why I wanted to talk to you alone. You are a policeman, sworn to uphold the law, this new law in this new country. But I am speaking to you now from the old law. You follow me, Levine. And if I say to you, I don't want vengeance for the slaying of my brother, I speak within a law that is older and deeper.”

“A law that says murder should be ignored and forgotten? A law that says life doesn't matter? I never heard of it.”

“Levine, you know what law I'm talking about! I'm his brother, and I—”

“You're a fool, Gold, and that's the damndest bribe I've ever been offered.”

“Bribe?” Gold seemed shocked at the thought. “I didn't offer you any—”

“What do I do to belong, Gold? I send in the label from a package of Passover candles, and then what do I get? I learn all about the secret handshake, and I get the ring with the secret compartment, and I get the magic decodifier so we can send each other messages others won't understand. Is that it?”

“You shouldn't mock what—”

“Is there anything you



wouldn't use, Gold? Do you have respect for anything at all?"

Gold looked away, his expression stony. "I thought I could talk to you," he said. "I thought you would understand."

"I do understand," Levine told him. "Get on your feet."

"What?"

"You're coming back to the precinct, to answer some more questions."

"But—but I've told you—" Gold started to say.

"You told me you didn't want your brother's murderer found. After a while, you'll tell me why. On your feet."

"For God's sake, Levine—"

"Get on your feet!"

It was a small room. The echoes of his shout came back to his ears, and he suddenly realized

he'd lost his temper despite himself, and his left hand jerked automatically to his chest, pressing there to feel for the heartbeat. He had a skip, every eighth beat or so, and when he allowed himself to get excited the skipping came closer together. That irregularity of rhythm was the most pronounced symptom he had to support his fear of heart trouble and it was never very far from his consciousness. He pressed his hand to his chest now, feeling the thumping within, and the skip, and counted from there to the next skip. . . seven.

He took a deep breath. Quietly he said, "Come along, Gold. Don't make me call in the other policeman to carry you."

ABRAHAM LEVINE couldn't bring himself to grill Gold personally after all; he was afraid he'd lose control. So he simply filled Stettin in on what had been said, and what he wanted to know. Stettin took care of the questioning, with assists from Andrews and Campbell, two of the other detectives now on duty, while Levine left the precinct again, to find Sal Casetta.

Casetta lived in the New Utrecht section of Brooklyn, in a brick tenement on 79th Street. It was a walk-up, and the bookmaker's apartment was on

the fourth floor. Levine climbed the stairs slowly, stopping to rest at each landing. When he got to the fourth floor, he paused to catch his breath, and light a cigarette before knocking on the door marked 14.

A woman answered—a short blowsy woman in a loose sweater and a tight black skirt. She was barefooted, and her feet were dirty, her toenails enameled a deep red. She looked challengingly at Levine.

Levine said, "I'm looking for Sal Casetta."

"He ain't home."

"Where can I find him?"

"What do you want him for?"

"Police," said Levine. "I don't want to talk to him about bookmaking. A friend of his was killed; maybe he could help us."

"What makes you think he wants to help you?"

"It was a friend of his that was killed."

"So what? You ain't a friend of his."

"If Sal was killed," Levine said, "and I was looking for his murderer, would you help me?"

The woman grimaced, and shrugged uneasily. "I told you he wasn't here," she said.

"Just tell me where I can find him."

She thought it over. She was chewing gum, and her jaw moved continuously for a full minute. Finally, she shrugged again and

said, "Come on in. I'll go get him for you."

"Thank you."

She led the way into a small living room, with soiled drapes at the windows, and not enough furniture.

"Grab a seat any place," she said. "Look out for roaches."

Levine thanked her again, and sat down gingerly on an unpainted wooden chair.

"What was the name of the friend?" she asked.

"Morry Gold."

"Oh, *that* bum." Her mouth twisted around its wad of gum.

"Why waste time on him?"

"Because he was killed," said Levine.

"You want to make work for yourself," she told him. "It's no skin off my nose. Wait here, I'll be right back."

While he waited Levine's thoughts kept reverting to Morry Gold. After about ten minutes, he heard the front door open, and a few seconds later the woman came back accompanied by a short, heavyset man with bushy black hair and rather shifty eyes.

He came in nodding his head jerkily, saying, "I read about it in the papers. I read about it this morning."

"You're Sal Casetta?"

"Yeah, that's right, that's me. You're a cop, huh?"

Levine showed his badge, then

said, "You used to play cards with Morry Gold?"

"Yeah, sure, that's right. Poker. Quarter, half-dollar. Friendly game, you know."

"Who were the other players?" Levine asked.

"Well, uh—" Casetta glanced nervously at the woman, and rubbed the back of his hand across his nose. "Well, you know how it is. You don't feel right about giving out names!"

"Why? Do you think one of them killed Gold?"

"Hey now—Listen. We're all friends. Nothing like that. I wouldn't want to bump Morry, and neither would those guys. We're all buddies."

"Then give me their names."

Casetta cleared his throat, and glanced at the woman again, and scuffed his feet on the floor. Finally, he said, "Well, all right. But don't tell them you got it from me, huh?"

"Gold's landlady identified you," Levine told him. "She could have identified the other two."

"Yeah, sure, that's right. So it's Jake Mosca—that's like Moscow, only with an 'a'—and Barney Feldman. Okay?"

Levine copied the names down. "You know where they live?"

"Naw, not me."

"We'll leave that a blank then. When was the last poker game?"

"At Morry's? That was on Saturday. Right, baby?"

The woman nodded. "Saturday," she said.

"Did Gold act nervous or depressed Saturday?"

"You mean, did he know he was gonna get it? Not a bit. Calm like always, you know?"

"Do you have any idea who might have wanted to kill him?" Levine asked.

"Not me. I know Morry from when we used to live in the same neighborhood, that's all. His business is his business."

"You wouldn't know who his enemies were."

"That's right. If Morry had enemies, he never said nothing to me."

"What about other friends?"

"Friends?" Casetta rubbed his nose again, then said, "We didn't see each other that much since we moved away. Just for the games. Uh, wait a second. There was another guy came in the game for a while, Arnie something. A fish, a real fish. So after a while he quit."

"You don't remember his last name?"

Casetta shook his head. "Just Arnie something. Maybe Jake or Barney knows."

"All right. Do you know Gold's brother, Abner?"

"Naw, I never met him. Morry talked about him sometimes. They didn't get along."

Levine got to his feet. "Thank you very much," he said.

"Yeah, sure. Morry was okay."

"Oh, one thing more. What about women? Did he have any woman friends that you know about?"

"I never seen him with a woman," Casetta said.

"Saturday at the game, did he seem to have an unusual amount of money on him? Or did he seem very broke? How did he seem to be fixed?"

"Like always. Nothing special, pretty well heeled but nothing spectacular, you know?" Casetta looked around, at the woman, at the apartment. "Like me," he said.

ELLY KAPP'S last known address was in Gravesend, off Avenue X, and since Kapp had once been caught turning stolen goods over to Morry Gold it occurred to Levine that the man might know whom Gold had been dealing with lately. He might even be still selling to Gold himself.

There was no Kapp listed among the mailboxes at the address. Levine pressed the bell-button beneath the metal plate reading *Superintendent*, and several minutes later a slow-rolling fat woman with receding gray hair appeared in the doorway, holding the door

open a scant three inches. She said nothing, only stared mistrustfully, so Levine dragged out his wallet and showed his identification.

"I'm looking for Elly Kapp," he said.

"Don't live here no more."

"Where does he live now?"

"I don't know." She started to close the door, but Levine held it open with the palm of his hand.

"When did he move?" he demanded.

The woman shrugged. "Who remembers?" Her eyes were dull, and watched his mouth rather than his eyes. "Who cares where he went, or what he's done?"

Levine moved his hand away, and allowed the woman to close the door. He watched through the glass as she turned and rolled slowly back across the inner vestibule. Her ankles were swollen like sausages. When she disappeared in the gloom just beyond Levine turned away and went back down the stoop to the Chevy.

He drove slowly back to the precinct. Indifference breathed in the air all around him, sullen and surly. *No man is important, the streets seemed to be saying. Man is only useful as long as he breathes. Once the breathing stops, he is forgotten. Time stretches away beyond him, smooth and slick and with no*

handholds. The man is dead, and almost as swiftly as a dropped heartbeat, the space which he occupied yawns empty and there is nothing left of him but a name.

At times, another man is paid to remember the name long enough to carve it on stone, and the stone is set in the earth, and immediately it begins to sink. But the man is gone, long since. What does it matter if he stopped a second ago or a century ago or a millenium ago? He stopped, he is no more, he is forgotten. Who cares?

Levine saw the red light just in time, and jammed on the brakes. He sat hunched over the wheel, unnerved at having almost run the light, and strove to calm himself. His breathing was labored, as though he'd been running, and he knew that the beating of his heart was erratic and heavy. He inhaled, very slowly, and let his breath out even more slowly while he waited for the light to change.

The instant it became green, he drove on across the intersection. He was calmer now. The death of Morry Gold had affected him too much, and he told himself he had to snap out of it. He knew, after all, the reason he was so affected. It was because Morry Gold's death had been greeted by such universal indifference.

Almost always, the victim of a homicide is survived by relatives and friends who are passionately concerned with his end, and makes a nuisance of themselves by badgering the police for quick results. With such rallying, the dead man doesn't seem quite so forlorn, quite so totally alone and forgotten.

In the interrogation room down the hall from the squadroom, Stettin and Andrews and Campbell were questioning Abner Gold. Levine stuck his head in, nodded at Stettin, avoided looking at Gold, and immediately shut the door again.

He turned away and walked slowly back down the hall toward the squadroom. He heard the door behind him open and close, and then Stettin, in long easy strides, had come up even with him.

Stettin shook his head. "Nothing, Abe," he said.

"No explanation?"

"Not from him. He won't say a word any more. Not until he calls a lawyer."

Levine shook his head tiredly. He knew the type. Abner Gold's one lone virtue would be patience. He would sit in silence, and wait, and wait until eventually the detectives found his stubborn silence intolerable, and then he knew he would be allowed to go home.

"I have an explanation,"

Stettin said. "He's afraid of an investigation. He's afraid if we dig too deep we'll come up with proof he worked with his brother."

"Maybe," said Levine. "Or maybe he's afraid we'll come up with proof he killed his brother."

"What for?"

"I don't know. For cheating him on some kind of deal. For blackmailing him. Your guess is as good as mine."

Stettin shrugged. "We can keep asking," he said. "But he can keep right on not answering until we can no longer stand the sight of him."

Levine glanced at his watch. Quarter to one. He'd stopped off for lunch on the way back. He said, "I'll go talk to him for a while."

"That's up to you."

The way he said it, Levine was reminded that Stettin didn't want to break his hump over this one. Levine walked over to his desk and sat down and said, "I got two more names from Casetta. Jake Mosca and Barney Feldman. No addresses. See what you can dig up on them, will you? And go talk to them."

"Sure. How was Casetta?"

"I don't know. Maybe Gold cheated him at poker. Maybe Gold was playing around with his wife. He didn't act nervous or worried." Levine rubbed a hand wearily across his face.

"I'll go talk to Gold now," he said. "Did we get the ME's report?"

"It's right there on your desk."

Levine didn't open it. He didn't want to read about Morry Gold's corpse. He said, "What kind of gun?"

"A thirty-eight. You look tired, Abe."

"I guess I am. I can sleep late tomorrow."

"Sure."

"Oh, one more thing. Elly Kapp isn't at that address any more. See what you can find there, will you?"

"Will do."

Levine walked down the hall again and took over the questioning of Gold. After Andrews and Campbell had left the room, Levine looked at Gold and said, "What did Morry do to you?"

Gold shook his head.

"You're a cautious man, Gold." Levine's voice rose impatiently. "It had to be something strong to make you kill him. Did he cheat you?"

Humor flickered at the corners of Gold's mouth. "He cheated me always," he said. "For years I was used to it, Abraham."

Levine shrugged off the use of the first name. It wasn't important enough to be angry about. "So he was blackmailing

you," he said, "and finally you'd had enough. But didn't you know someone would hear the sound of the shot? Mrs. Temple saw you go out."

"A false identification," said Gold. "I would risk nothing for Maurice. He was not worth the danger of killing him."

Levine shrugged. If Gold knew a potato silencer had been used, he hadn't mentioned it. Not that Levine had expected the trick to work. Tricks like that work only in the movies. And killers go to the movies, too.

Levine asked questions for over two hours. Sometimes Gold answered, and sometimes he didn't. As the time wore on, Levine grew more and more tired, more and more heavy and depressed; but Gold remained unchanged, displaying only the same stolid patience.

Finally, at three-thirty, Levine told him he could leave. Gold thanked him, with muted sarcasm, and left. Levine went back down the hall to the squadroom.

There was a note from Stettin. Elly Kapp was being held in a precinct in west Brooklyn. Last night, he'd been caught halfway through the window of a warehouse near the Brooklyn piers, and tomorrow morning he would be transferred downtown.

Levine phoned the precinct and got permission from the



Lieutenant of Detectives there to come over and question the prisoner. Stettin had taken the Chevy, so Levine had to drive an unfamiliar car, newer and stiffer.

Kapp had very little useful to say. At first, he said, "Morry Gold? I ain't seen him since we took the fall. I'm a very superstitious guy, Mister. I don't go near anyone who is with me when a job goes sour. That guy by me is a jinx."

Levine questioned him further, wanting to know the names of other thieves with whom Gold had had dealings, whether or not Gold had been known to cheat thieves in the past, whether or not Kapp knew of anyone who harbored a grudge against Gold. Kapp pleaded ignorance for a while, and then gradually began to look crafty.

"Maybe I could help you out," he said finally. "I don't promise you nothing, but maybe I could. If we could work out maybe a deal?"

Levine shook his head, and left the room. Kapp called after him, but Levine didn't listen to what he was saying. Kapp didn't know anything; his information would be useless. He would implicate anybody, make up any kind of story he thought Levine wanted to hear, if it would help him get a lighter sentence for the attempted robbery of the warehouse.

It was four o'clock. Levine brought the unfamiliar car back to the precinct, signed out, and went home.

THE THIRD DAY of the case, Levine came to work at four in the afternoon, starting a three-day tour on the night shift. As usual, Stettin was already there when he arrived.

"Hi, Abe," Stettin greeted. "I talked to Feldman yesterday. He owns a grocery store in Brownsville. Like everybody else, he didn't know Morry Gold all that well. But he did give me a couple more names."

"Good," said Levine. He had been about to shrug out of his coat, but now he kept it on.

"One of them's a woman," said Stettin. "May Torasch. She was possibly Gold's girl friend.

Feldman didn't know for sure."

"What about Feldman?"

"I don't think so, Abe. He and Gold just know each other from the old days, that's all."

"All right."

"I tried to see the other one, Jake Mosca, but he wasn't home."

"Maybe he'll be home now." Levine started to button his coat again.

Stettin said, "Want me to come along?"

Levine was going to say no, tell him to check out the other names he had, but then he changed his mind. Stettin would be his partner for a while, so they ought to start learning how to work together. Besides, Stettin was only half-hearted in this case, and he might miss something important. Levine wished he'd questioned the grocer himself.

"Come on along," Levine said.

"Mosca lived way out Flatbush Avenue toward Floyd Bennett. There were old two-family houses out that way, in disrepair, and small apartment buildings that weren't quite tenements. It was in one of the latter that Mosca lived, on the second floor.

The hall was full of smells, and badly lit. A small boy who needed a haircut stood down at the far end of the hall and

watched them as Levine knocked on the door.

There were sounds of movement inside, but that was all. Levine knocked again, and this time a voice called, "Who is it?"

"Police," called Levine.

Inside, a bureau drawer opened, and Levine heard cursing. His eyes widening, he jumped quickly to one side, away from the door, shouting, "Andy! Get out of the way!"

From inside, there were sounds like wood cracking, and a series of punched out holes appeared in the door just as Stettin started to obey.

Levine was clawing on his hip for his gun. The shots, sounding like wood cracking, kept resounding in the apartment, and the holes kept appearing in the door. Plaster was breaking in small chunks in the opposite wall now.

The door was thin, and Levine could hear the clicking when the gun was empty and the man inside kept pulling the trigger. He stepped in front of the door, raised his foot, kicked it just under the knob. The lock splintered away and the door swung open. The man inside was goggle-eyed with rage and fear.

The instant the door came open he threw the empty gun at Levine and spun away for the window. Levine ducked and ran into the apartment, shouting to

Mosca to stop. Mosca went over the sill headfirst, out onto the fire escape.

Levine fired at him, trying to hit him in the leg, but the bullet went wild. But before he could fire again Mosca went clattering down the fire escape.

Levine got to the window in time to see the man reach the ground. He ran across the weedy back yard, over the wooden fence, and went dodging into a junkyard piled high with rusting parts of automobiles.

Levine was trying to do everything at once. He started out the window, then realized Mosca had too much of a head-start on him. Then he remembered Andy and, as he descended to the floor, he realized that Stettin hadn't followed him into the room and wondered why.

The moment he emerged into the hallway the reason became clear. Andy was lying on his side a yard from the door, his entire right shoulder drenched with blood and his knees drawn up sharply. He was no longer moving.

Levine bent over him for an instant, then swung about, ran down the stairs and out to the Chevy and called in.

Everyone seemed to show up at once. Ambulance and patrolmen and detectives, suddenly filling the corridor. Lieutenant

Barker, chief of the precinct's detective squad, came with the rest and stood looking down at Andy Stettin, his face cold with rage. He listened to Levine's report of what had happened, saying nothing until Levine had finished.

Then he said, "He may pull through, Abe. He still has a chance. You mustn't blame yourself for this."

Should I have been able to tell him? Levine wondered. He was new, and I was more or less breaking him in, showing him the ropes, so shouldn't I have told that when you hear the cursing, when you hear the bureau drawer opening, get away from the door.

But how could I have told him everything, all the different things you learn? You learn by trial and error, the same as in any other walk of life. But here, sometimes, they only give you one error.

It isn't fair.

The apartment was swarming with police, and soon they found out why Mosca had fired eight times through the door. A shoebox in a closet was a quarter full of heroin, cut and capsuled, ready for the retail trade. Mosca had a record, but for theft not for narcotics, so there was no way Levine and Stettin could have known.

For an hour or two, Levine

was confused. The world swirled around him at a mad pace, but he couldn't really concentrate on any of it. People talked to him, and he answered one way and another, without really understanding what was being said to him or what he was replying. He walked in a shocked daze, not comprehending.

He came out of it back at the precinct. The entire detective squad was there, all the off-duty men having been called in, and Lieutenant Barker was talking to them. They filled the squad-room, sitting on the desks and leaning against the walls, and Lieutenant Barker stood facing them.

"We're going to get this Jake Mosca," he was saying. "We're going to get him because Andy Stettin is damn close to death. Do you know why we have to get a cop-killer? It's because the cop is a symbol. He's a symbol of the law, the most solid symbol of the law the average citizen ever sees. Our society is held together by law, and we cannot let the symbol of the law be treated with arrogance and contempt."

"I want the man who shot Stettin. You'll get to everyone this Mosca knows, every place he might think of going. You'll get him because Andy Stettin is dying—and he is a cop."

No, thought Levine, *that's wrong. Andy Stettin is a man,*

and that's why we have to get Jake Mosca. He was alive, and now he may die. He is a living human being, and that's why we have to get his would-be killer. There shouldn't be any other reasons, there shouldn't have to be any other reasons.

But he didn't say anything.

Apparently, the lieutenant could see that Levine was still dazed, because he had him switch with Rizzo, who was catching at the squadroom phone this tour. For the rest of the tour, Levine sat by the phone in the empty squadroom, and tried to understand.

Andrews and Campbell brought Mosca in a little after eleven. They'd found him hiding in a girl friend's apartment, and when they brought him in he was bruised and semi-conscious. Campbell explained he'd tried to resist arrest, and no one argued with him.

Levine joined the early part of the questioning, and got Mosca's alibi for the night Morry Gold was killed. He made four phone calls, and the alibi checked out. Jake Mosca had not murdered Morry Gold.

THE FOURTH DAY, Abraham Levine again arrived at the precinct at four o'clock. He was scheduled to catch this tour, so he spent another eight hours at the telephone, and got nothing

done on the Morry Gold killing. The fifth day, working alone now, he went on with the investigation.

May Torasch, the woman whose name Andy Stettin had learned, worked in the credit department of a Brooklyn department store. Levine went to her apartment, on the fringe of Sunset, at seven o'clock, and found her home.

She was another blowsy woman; reminding him strongly of Sal Casetta's wife. But she was affable, and seemed to want to help, though she assured Levine that she and Morry Gold had never been close friends.

"Face it," she said, "he was a bum. He wasn't going nowhere, so I never wasted much time on him."

She had seen Morry two days before his death; they'd gone to a bar off Flatbush Avenue and had a few drinks. But she hadn't gone back to his apartment with him. She hadn't been in the mood.

"I was kind of low that night," she said.

"Was Morry low?" Levine asked.

"No, not him. He was the same as ever. He'd talk about the weather all the time, and his lousy landlady. I wouldn't have gone out with him, but I was feeling so low I didn't want to go home."

She didn't have any idea who might have murdered him. "He was just a bum, just a small-timer. Nobody paid any attention to him." Nor could she add to the names of Gold's acquaintances.

From her apartment, Levine went to the bar where she and Morry had last been together. It was called *The Green Lantern*, and was nearly empty when Levine walked in shortly before nine. He showed his identification to the bartender and asked about Morry Gold. But the bartender knew very few of his customers by name.

"I might know this guy by sight," he explained, "but the name don't mean a thing." The same was true of May Torasch.

There were still two more names on the list, Joe Whistler and Arnie Hendricks, the latter being the Arnie Sal Casetta had mentioned. Joe Whistler was another bartender, so Levine went looking for him first, and found him at work, tending bar in a place called *Robert's*, in Canarsie, not more than a dozen blocks from Levine's home.

Whistler knew Gold only casually, and could not add nothing. Levine spent half an hour with him, and then went in search of Arnie Hendricks.

Arnie Hendricks was a small-time fight manager, originally from Detroit. He

wasn't at home, and the gym where he usually hung out was closed this time of night. Levine went back to the precinct, sat down at his desk, and looked at his notes.

He had eight names relating to Morry Gold. There were one brother, one woman, and six casual friends. None of them had offered any reasons for Morry's murder, none of them had suggested any suspects who might have hated Morry enough to kill him, and none of them had given any real cause to be considered a suspect himself, with the possible exception of Abner Gold.

But the more Levine thought about Abner Gold, the more he was willing to go along with Andy Stettin's idea. The man was afraid of an investigation not because he had murdered his brother, but because he was afraid the police would be able to link him to his brother's traffic in stolen goods.

Eight names. One of them, Arnie Hendricks, was still an unknown, but the other seven had been dead ends.

Someone had murdered Morry Gold. Somewhere in the world, the murderer still lived. He had a name and a face; and he had a connection somehow with Morry Gold. And he was practically unsought. Of the hundreds of millions of human

beings on the face of the earth, only one Abraham Levine, who had never known Morry Gold in life, was striving to find the man who had brought about Morry Gold's death.

After a while, wearily, he put his notes away and pecked out his daily report on one of the office Remingtons. Then it was midnight, and he went home. And that was when he got some good news from the hospital—Andy Stettin was going to live.

THE SIXTH DAY, he went to the precinct, reported in, got the Chevy, and went out looking for Arnie Hendricks. He spent seven hours on it, stopping off only to eat, but he couldn't find Hendricks anywhere. People he talked to had seen Hendricks during the day, so the man wasn't in hiding, but Levine couldn't seem to catch up with him.

It was suggested that Hendricks might be off at a poker game somewhere in Manhattan, but Levine couldn't find out exactly where the poker game was being held.

He got back to the precinct at eleven-thirty, and started typing out his daily report. There wasn't much to report. He'd looked for Hendricks, and had failed to find him. He would look again tomorrow.

Lieutenant Barker came in at quarter to twelve. That was unusual; the lieutenant was rarely around later than eight or nine at night, unless something really important had happened in the precinct. He came into the squadroom and said, "Abe, can I talk to you? Bring that report along."

Levine pulled the incomplete report from the typewriter and followed the Lieutenant into his office. The Lieutenant sat down, and motioned for Levine to do the same, then held out his hand.

"Could I see that report?" he asked.

"It isn't finished."

"That's all right."

The lieutenant glanced at the report, and then dropped it on his desk. "Abe," he said, "do you know what our full complement is supposed to be?"

"Twenty men, isn't it?"

"Right. And we have fifteen. With Crawley out, fourteen. Abe, here's your reports for the last six days. What have you been doing, man? We're understaffed, we're having trouble keeping up with the necessary stuff, and look what you've been doing. For six days you've been running around in circles. And for what? For a small-time punk who got a small-time punk's end."

"He was murdered, Lieutenant."

"Lots of people are murdered,

Abe. When we can, we find out who did the job, and we turn him over to the DA. But we don't make an obsession out of it. Abe, for almost a week now you haven't been pulling your weight around here. There've been three complaints about how long it took us to respond to urgent calls. We're understaffed, but we're not *that* understaffed."

Barker tapped the little pile of reports. "This man Gold was a fence, and a cheap crook. He isn't worth it, Abe. We can't waste any more time on him. When you finish up this report, I want you to recommend we switch the case to Pending. And tomorrow I want you to get back with the team."

"Lieutenant, I've got one more man to—"

"And tomorrow there'll be one more, and the day after that one more, Abe, you've been working on nothing else at *all*. Forget it, will you? This is a cheap penny-ante bum. Even his brother doesn't care who killed him. Let it go, Abe."

He leaned forward over the desk. "Abe, some cases don't get solved right away. That's what the Pending file is for. So six weeks from now, or six months from now, or six years from now, while we're working on something else, when the break finally does come, we can pull that case out and hit it hot and

heavy again. But it's *cold* now. Abe, so let it lie."

Speeches roiled around inside Levine's head, but he didn't say them. He nodded, reluctantly. "Yes, sir," he said.

"The man was a bum," said the lieutenant, "pure and simple. Forget him, he isn't worth your time."

"Yes, sir," said Levine.

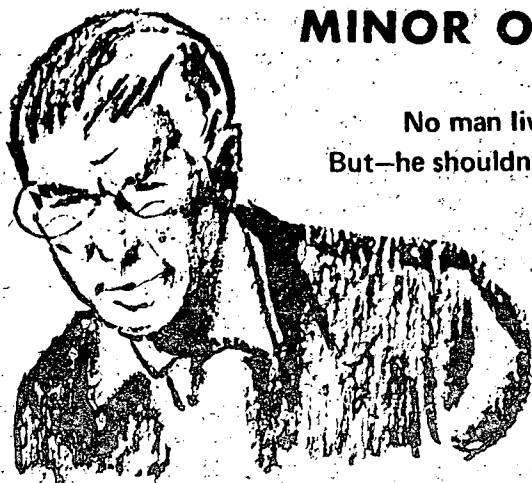
He went back to the squadroom and finished typing the report, recommending that the Morry Gold case be switched to the Pending file. Then it was twelve o'clock, and he walked to the subway station.

The underground platform was cold and deserted. He stood shivering on the concrete, his hands jammed deep into his pockets. He waited twenty minutes before a train came. Then it did come, crashed into the station and squealed to a stop.

The car was empty, with a few newspapers abandoned on the seats. The doors slid shut behind him and the train started forward. He was the only one in the car and all the seats were empty, but he didn't sit down.

The train rocked and jolted as it hurtled through the cold hole under Brooklyn, and Abraham Levine stood swaying in the middle of the empty car, a short man, bulky in his overcoat, hulk-shouldered, crying.

MINOR OPERATION



No man lives forever.
But—he shouldn't be helped to die.

by
**HERBERT
HARRIS**

WITH DISPASSIONATE calm, but with eyes that missed nothing, Inspector Neal Chailey watched his host pour whisky into a glass.

Had the detective been visiting his host only in the line of duty, he would have declined the drink. But this was slightly different, Dr. Ebbage being a friend, he had acquiesced.

Chailey saw the bottle rattle against the glass. The doctor was making an effort to steady his shaking hand, but he must have realized the pretence couldn't last.

It was sad to see a brilliant man go to pieces, the detective thought. Ebbage had once ranked with the elite among surgeons.

How had the rot set in so swiftly? Drugs? It looked like it to Chailey.

"It's funny, really," the doctor said, his voice strained and hoarse, "when you think how often, Chailey, you've talked to me about other people's tragedies.

"Your clients and mine, Inspector. The anxiety case jumping in front of a train, the neurotic woman turned shop-lifter, the lonely girl drifting into trouble... and now..."

Chailey sat frowning; somehow this was hurting him.

"We come a bit nearer home, eh, doctor?" He looked up. "It was a silly thing to do, Ebbage, trying to hide your relations with Mrs. Vine."

The muscles in the doctor's face twitched. "Yes, I suppose it was. I've no doubt she's told you all about it?"

"She didn't want to. But policemen can be very persis-

tent. We know of course that you were lovers."

Dr. Ebbage rose and stood with his back to the inspector. He gazed out of the window for a few moments, then:

"Sounds sordid, doesn't it? A doctor having an affair with a married woman patient. Against all the rules...except the natural ones. Did she tell you I was the only bright spot in the awful life she led with her husband?"

"No, but we guessed that. She told us Vine had found out about you, had threatened to divorce her and to name you as co-respondent if you didn't stop seeing each other."

Ebbage sighed. "Poor Joan. And poor me! Nasty outlook for a doctor, wasn't it?"

"Look, doctor," Chailey said, leaning forward, "I'm asking you this because I like you. Why the devil didn't you give her up?"

The doctor pressed his hands against his eyes. His soiled, frayed cuffs seemed to Chailey to symbolize his gradual slide downhill.

"It was impossible... unthinkable. I loved her more than life itself."

There was a silence, then Chailey asked: "Why did you try to hide the fact that Vine gave you a lift in his car shortly before he was—before he died?"

Ebbage rose abruptly and poured out more whisky. "I'd forgotten about the lift. You see, I met him accidentally in Smeed's, the hardware store in High Street. I was looking for a fibre mat to go outside my office door. Vine was buying a length of garden hose."

"Did you discuss Joan at all?"

"Yes, when we got outside. Quite calmly. There was no violence. It finished with his offering me a lift, because I hadn't my car with me."

Chailey frowned. "A curiously friendly act to offer a lift to his wife's lover? I assume you had promised him you wouldn't see her again?"

"Yes."

"He must have felt quite relieved," the detective said. "I wonder why he went off and committed suicide?"

Ebbage shrugged: "Who can say why anybody commits suicide? The human mind is unpredictable." He spilled some whisky on his tie and shakily wiped it dry with a handkerchief.

"You ought to have mentioned that lift Vine gave you." Chailey said reprovingly. "We would not have known about it if we hadn't been told by the salesman at Smeed's—the one who put the roll of hosepipe in Vine's car for him."

"Yes, I realize I should have mentioned it, in view of what came later."

"How far did he take you in the car?"

"Oh, only as far as here."

Chailey asked directly: "You didn't go to Birch Woods with him?"

The doctor looked at him sharply, and gave a short nervous laugh. "I'm not absolutely certain where Birch Woods is."

"It's that group of trees the other side of the railway viaduct where Vine was found dead in his car."

"Oh, yes, of course!" Sweat was glistening on the doctor's face, lined and grey with mental stress. "A pity I *didn't* go with him. I might have prevented..." He paused and smiled, grimly. "No, perhaps I should have *let* him kill himself."

Chailey said quietly: "But he didn't kill himself, did he?"

Ebbage swallowed, avoiding the detective's unwavering gaze. "I understood he cut a length off the hose he had bought and attached it to the car exhaust. Didn't he die of carbon monoxide poisoning?"

"That's correct."

"Then I don't follow..."

"Someone else could have cut off the length of hose and fixed it so that Vine was left in

the car to die—don't you agree?"

The doctor fumbled clumsily with a packet of cigarettes, lit one with trembling fingers. "But whoever did that, Chailey, would have had to render Vine unconscious first." A tiny smile flickered about his mouth. "This reminds me of some of our previous chats, Inspector."

The inspector didn't return the smile. "We think Vine *was* rendered unconscious first—probably by smothering with a car rug, but we can't be absolutely sure how."

"But whoever did that also cut a length from the new hose Vine had bought and arranged it so that Vine died of exhaust-fumes... in Birch Woods, in a closed car. An obvious suicide, one might think. But *we* think it was murder."

The sweat shone on Ebbage's upper lip. There was a glazed look about his eyes. "Perhaps Vine had some enemies?" he suggested.

Chailey nodded. "At least two. One was a passive enemy—his wife Joan. And one was active." He paused. "I'm going to suggest, Doctor, that the active enemy was *you*."

Ebbage sat looking at the detective for a long moment. Then he got up and walked over to the window again. He wiped

his face with a handkerchief and his hand appeared to be and braced his shoulders. Then: slightly steadier.

"Of course, you know, Chailey, don't you? Only it hurts you to come out with it. Not that it does you much good to take me, old man. I haven't long to go anyway. Did you think I was taking drugs just for the fun of it?"

"No Ebbage, I didn't think that," Chailey said sadly.

The doctor turned his pale drawn face towards the detective. "The whole point is that Joan has been set free."

"From what?"

"From her husband. Perhaps you might call it a 'mercy killing'? Vine made her life hell. She couldn't have stood very much more."

The detective was staring at the carpet, not moving.

"What went wrong, Chailey? I'd like to know. Did I bungle the job in some way?" he asked the inspector.

"Yes."

"Would it be breaking your code to tell me how?"

"Yes," Chailey said, "but I will tell you. It was that hosepipe. It was made of pretty tough material. It needed quite a sharp knife to cut it."

"So?" The doctor was pouring himself another drink,

"We searched the car. We searched Vine's clothes. We searched the tool-kit. We looked everywhere. But there was no knife—no sort of tool he could have used to cut that hose."

"So whoever cut the hose, Ebbage, put it back in his pocket before he left. A careless mistake. He should have left it with the body, shouldn't he?"

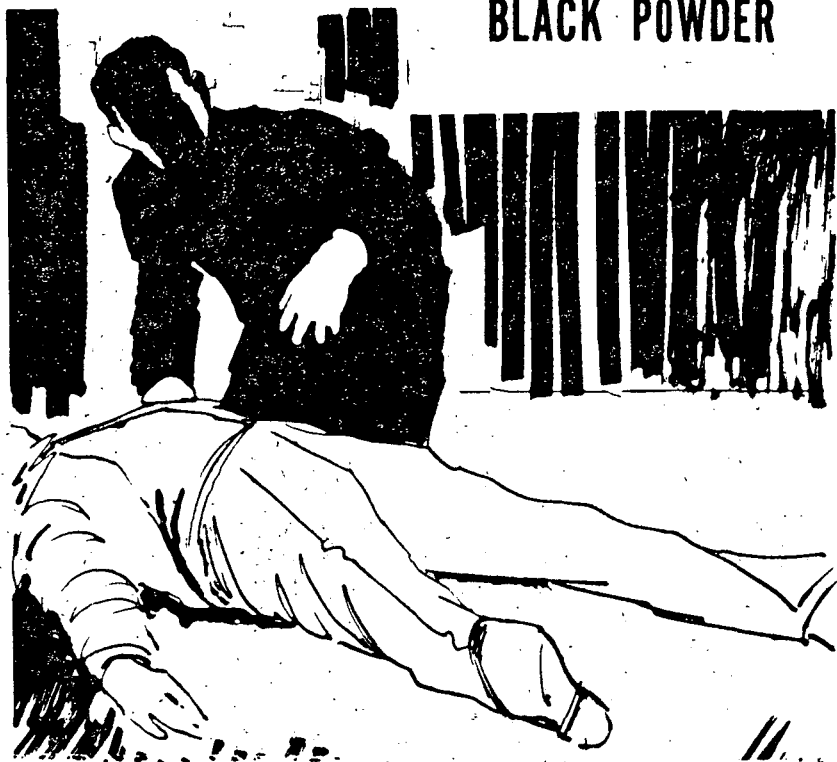
"Good God how very clumsy," the doctor said. "And cutting that hose was only a minor operation. A surgeon should be more careful about knives."

The doctor downed the Scotch at a gulp and stood smiling faintly at the empty glass. After a few moments, he began to sway, and Chailey jumped up, snatched the glass from him and stared at it.

"Nothing you can do about it now," Ebbage said. "I had the capsule ready just in case. I wouldn't bother about taking me in your car... a hearse would be more appropriate."

The doctor staggered and fell to the floor. Inspector Chailey looked down at the still figure and walked sadly towards the telephone.

BLACK POWDER



"The dough's here," the man said. "You'll get yours later." John Murphy shuddered. He knew only too well what the fat man had meant...

by **ANDREW BOGEN**

JOHN MURPHY saw the two men as he got off the elevator. They still had their hard hats on, which was strange, because the checkout time was at 5 p.m. The clock over the construction-trailer stood at 5:25.

One of the men, about thirty years old, with a beefy face and thick, muscled arms, stepped forward and said, "Hi there! Aren't you the new guy—Murphy or something?"

His shorter companion stood

back by the dirty-yellow bulldozer in the construction pit.

Murphy looked around. The building site was deserted; the workers all checked out on time. He was new on the job, that's true. He got back from Vietnam three months ago and his face was still burnt red from the sun, his powerful wiry frame honed by constant training; his straight hair was windswept and his eyes were blinking from the breeze.

He stayed behind on the sixteenth floor, sitting on huge steel girders, looking over Manhattan from the rising skeleton of the new office building, a snappy wind blowing way up high.

"Yeah, I'm Murphy. With the welding crew. Anything I can do for you?"

He was just properly cool, he didn't know who these men were. No need to antagonize them, of course. On the other hand, there was something he sensed, something menacing about the way they were standing around after hours, standing and waiting for him.

The beefy man stepped closer and said, "My name is Bramer. Me and my partner there, we work the bulldozer. We heard you were the kid back from Vietnam. Green Beret or something."

John Murphy relaxed for a moment. Maybe the men had heard about him, maybe from the boss, heard he just got out of the service two months ago.

"Well," he answered. "I'm back for a while now—it's like a hundred years you know. Had a hard time getting lined up again back home. This job was a lucky break."

Bramer wiped his face on his red checkered shirt. "Yeah, that's lucky all right. This kind of job I mean, two, three hundred a week. Can't pick them off a tree these days."

"That is the truth," Murphy said.

"Of course, a big guy like you, you're practically built for a job like this, huh? Guess you got plenty of exercise and all that."

"They kept us hopping," Murphy said, getting impatient. He shifted his body forward, starting to move toward the blue and white painted plywood fencing that surrounded the building site. It was getting late. His mother would be setting the table now, back in the little detached frame house in Canarsie, cooking up a storm, as she did every day, now that she had her soldier boy back again after three long years. She knew he was getting on, though, twenty-six next October, and wouldn't be staying

around the house much longer. So she was trying to make each day count.

The big man moved heavily, almost blocking his way, and said, "Heard around, you were some special whiz-kid with explosives in the war. Is that right?"

Murphy tugged at his ear, slightly annoyed. "I was with a demolition team, if that's what you mean. But now look, it's nice to make your acquaintance, but I've got to be going. I'll see you tomorrow, I guess."

From the corner of his eyes he saw the short man by the bulldozer coming to life, taking running steps up the incline of the pit. Bramer blocked Murphy's way and in another minute it was too late.

A black-muzzled Smith & Wesson '38 pointed straight from the small man's fist at Murphy. With a sinking feeling, Murphy knew he wasn't going home just yet. He was being invited to stay overtime.

Bramer shook his head and said, "That's Mike for you. He doesn't want you to leave yet. We have some more talking to do with you. Let's go."

The man called Mike was about forty, had a thin wiry face and a sallow, unhealthy look about him. Murphy saw that look in the war, it was a sign of malnutrition there. What

it meant here, he could only guess—a look of cruelty or violence, he thought.

They led him behind the elevator shaft and walked past the cinder-block pile.

"Settle down, kid," Mike said quietly, pointing the gun to a row of double stacked Keystone cement bags.

Murphy sat down and his hands felt the dry grit of the powder on the bags. His stomach was tensed up, the way it used to get when he was planting mines in the jungle, expecting VC behind every branch and bush.

"Look here, fellows, a joke is a joke," Murphy tried, "so why don't you let me in on it? If it's funny, I'll laugh at it too."

"Nothing funny about it," Bramer said. "We are dead serious."

He put a special edge on 'dead' and Murphy got the message. Whatever they wanted, they weren't kidding.

Mike said in a hoarse voice, "We've got a big thing lined up. Something that can make all of us rich. All you've got to do is work with us. It will be all over in a few hours."

"If you need me for anything, then how come you pulled a gun on me?"

"We don't have time," Mike said. "It's now or never. We

can't take a chance on your saying no."

Murphy shook his head. "You mind telling me what you're talking about? What's now or never? What am I going to say no to?"

"Okay," Bramer said, pushing his thumbs under his belt, and spreading his legs as he spoke. "Tomorrow is Friday, payday for the whole crew of this here construction site. The latest we heard from the chief is one hundred and five people working here. Figure an average of two-fifty per guy. That's about fifty thousand for the last two weeks. Plus the gravy. When the elevator shaft caved in Monday—you remember that, Murphy?—fifty guys stayed overtime, maybe six, seven hours. That's double time, you know. That's another ten grand right there."

A sudden realization came to Murphy and he said, "Are you trying to say you want to rob the company payroll? And I'm supposed to help you do it?"

"You're getting there," Mike said. "I see they teach you a little sharp thinking in the service. Like the man says, there's over sixty thousand in cash, right there, waiting to be taken."

He pointed at the small, sagging brownstone on the right. The fifty-year-old two-

story building was going to come down too, but now it was still used for an on-the-spot office space for the Glossham Construction Company.

The architects had the first floor, the construction boss and the union local used the second. Payroll and personnel records were kept on the second floor too, and it was there that Mike was pointing to.

"Wells Fargo delivered the payroll at 4:30 this afternoon," Mike went on. "It's going to be in the safe now till tomorrow morning. But we have got to get into that safe tonight."

"You guys must be crazy," Murphy said gloomily. "I'm no safe cracker. I never had anything to do with stuff like this. What the heck do you want with me?"

Mike, who seemed to be the brains of the outfit, smiled for the first time. It was a slow, sarcastic smile, almost smirking.

"My friend," he said, "we don't need any safecrackers. We want you to use your fancy Army knowledge and blow that safe apart for us. Nice and quiet and just enough. Don't hurt the dollar bills, huh?"

Murphy rubbed his chin in disbelief, but he slowly realized the men were serious. A chill formed down his back, for he knew he had to act now, before

it was too late, before things went any further.

His hands had been gathering together the layer of cement on top of the bags, and now he carefully closed his fist over the small bunch of Portland. He was ready to fling the powder into Mike's face, but as his arm started the arc, Mike jumped sideways and shook the gun at him.

"Easy does it, Murph!" he cried. "Don't try it! I'm one step ahead of you! The next time, I'll let you have it."

Murphy allowed his arm to drop slowly. His eyes searched the site, the cracks in the high plywood fence. Maybe he could signal to a passerby. The sky was almost dark now, but still this was New York City; there had to be a hundred people walking by every minute.

"No use, pal," Mike said sharply. "No way they can see you from there. The sidewalk's got lights, in here we don't. They can't see into the dark. You ought to know that."

The small man was practically reading his mind, Murphy thought. Nevertheless, if they needed him, they obviously wouldn't hurt him. Not yet anyway.

"Listen, Bramer, Mike. What do you need me for? There must be a dozen professionals who can crack that safe for



you. I'm an amateur. I never stole a nickel in my life."

Mike shook his head. "No good, Murphy. Number one, we don't call in any pros, even if we knew any. They take fifty percent right off the top. Number two, we didn't have time anyway. The big payroll is here now, this afternoon."

"You don't mean to tell me you suddenly decided to take that payroll?" Murphy asked. "You must've planned ahead."

Bramer chuckled and his belly moved his belt up and down with each guffaw. "Sure we were thinking of all that cash sitting in there every two weeks. And only one guard to protect it. But when you showed up, and we heard you were some sort of bomb expert, well, it fitted together."

"I'm sure you could've fixed up some dynamite," said Murphy. "You guys must know enough to blow that safe. You

see how they handle the stuff when they're blasting for the foundation."

"Blasting is the word for it," Mike said. "We would blow that safe to the moon. Can't you understand, we don't want *blasting*. We want an absolutely clean and neat job. We want the money nice and untouched. And you'll get a cut. Five thousand is yours."

It was all clear now. Bramer and Mike wanted a professional job at amateur rates. Giving up five thousand certainly beat giving up thirty.

"What if I refuse?" he asked, trying to sound calm and businesslike. "You can't force me to do this."

"Oh no?" Mike said menacingly. "You see, Bramer called a friend of his this afternoon in Brooklyn. Around five, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," said Bramer. "I called this friend and he kind of made sure you'll cooperate. Insurance, you might say."

Murphy felt a small shiver of fear. "What are you talking about?"

Mike shoved the pistol into closer range. "We're talking about your quitting the stall. Stop all this talk and get to work! I'm sure Mrs. Murphy would want it that way."

"Mrs. Murphy? My mother? Why you—" He swung out in a

flash of anger, but Bramer grabbed him from behind.

"Stop it! She isn't hurt. We have somebody sitting with her, just to be sure you behave."

"Yeah," Mike added. "A widowed woman like her, she can use some company, that's all."

Murphy felt the anger in his stomach tying itself into a knot. "You're lying," he said coldly.

The men looked at each other. Then Mike spoke in almost a whisper. "Listen, soldier boy, this is the last time we're giving in to you. I'll let you make a call to her just to see. But after that you keep your mouth shut and do as you're told!"

They shuffled him out and walked up to the corner of 53rd Street. Bramer held him on the left and on the right Mike pressed the gun through his pocket into Murphy's ribcage.

There were no cops in sight. Taxi's whizzed by, pedestrians hurried along, minding their own business. There was no help coming from there.

Maybe the phone, Murphy thought. If he could get to dial, he could call, let's see, he could call Pete Jager, down the block in Canarsie. Pete worked for the Fire Department, he would know exactly what to do. Even a few words to him would be enough, he was sure of that. He

knew he couldn't dial operator or 911 for the police. That could be spotted at once. He had to dial a real number.

"Okay, hero," he heard Bramer say. "Call your mother and see who answers."

Murphy felt his palms sweat. This was his chance. He opened the booth, yanked out a dime and shoved it into the slot. A couple of words to Pete, he'll make believe he's talking to his mother.

He dialed one, two, three digits when a dark, boney hand slammed down the hook.

"Wise guy," Mike spat at him: "You give me the number and I'll dial. And no tricks!"

Murphy felt helpless. The skinny dark-faced man was too clever, anticipating his every move, before he made it.

Mike dialed, listened for the ring and gave the phone back to Murphy. The phone rang five times. Then a husky male voice came on. Murphy gritted his teeth. "Hello? This is John Murphy! Let me speak to my mother!"

Mike grabbed the receiver and said quickly, "It's okay, Charlie. We've got him. Put her on for a second!"

Her voice was weak, but controlled. "Johnny?" she whispered. "Are you all right? This man says they'll—"

"That's enough!" the husky

male voice cut in and John Murphy heard a click. The line went dead.

He was silent for a moment. "Okay," he said finally. "I'll do it. But how do I know she'll be all right?"

"After the job is done, we'll all drive over to pick up Charlie. You'll see for yourself," Mike answered.

"I'll need material for this. Where are you supposed to get that?"

"No sweat," Bramer replied. "There's this marine-supply store. He's got all the explosives you want. He's open till midnight."

"He'll be mighty curious about the stuff I'll be picking."

"Relax, Murphy," said Bramer. "This guy doesn't ask questions. In his line he can't be too fussy."

They walked him to a dark-green Mercury station wagon on Lexington Avenue. Bramer got behind the wheel and drove to the Neptune Marine Supplies and Dynamite on the Westside piers. The store was almost deserted and a sleepy-eyed fat man read the *News* behind the counter.

Murphy selected his stuff carefully, calculating precisely the materials and equipment. He knew now that this was maybe his most dangerous assignment, more so than any

he had in the humid jungles of Vietnam.

Bramer was right. Although the fat man gave Murphy a long silent look as he checked him out, he asked no questions. Murphy could also see why. Everything cost twice what it should have. Obviously, silence had its price.

They were back at the construction site at 11:00. A small light filtered through the second floor window of the brownstone:

"What are you going to do about the guard?" Murphy asked.

Bramer stepped stealthily toward the entrance of the small building and reached inside his jacket.

"Leave that to me," he said; and even in the darkness, Murphy could see the glint of a brass-knuckle in his hand.

"You can come up in ten minutes," he motioned to Mike.

When Murphy saw the body of the guard, it was shoved under a desk, but a small trickle of blood crept out toward the middle of the room where the floor sloped. Bramer folded up a switch blade in disgust.

"He fought like an animal," he said with a taut face. "I couldn't help it. He saw my face!"

The two men looked at each other, then at Murphy. Mike

shook his head in displeasure. Murphy guessed it was less for the death of the guard than for the added complications it created.

Murphy knew then that no cop, no passerby, no phone calls would get him out of this one. He was on his own. He was a witness to murder and the killer had him and his mother.

In the far corner of the room, the dark grey safe sat bolted to the floor.

"Get to work, Murphy," said Mike, with the '38 still grasped solidly in his hand. "And remember, make it quiet and neat. We don't want shredded money. Do it right, you know how, and nobody else gets hurt."

Murphy glanced at the riverlet of blood on the black tiled floor, but said nothing. He walked quickly to the safe as the two watched him silently.

The safe stood about two and a half feet high, had two hinges on the right and a Yale combination lock left of center. The door of a safe is always the weakest link, Murphy thought. This was no exception. A small 1/8th of an inch slit ran around the four edges of the rough-surfaced, black specked steel door.

He picked black powder for the job. He had always found it the most reliable low explosive around. In the service the

hardest part of any assignment was the finding of the proper limits of sensitivity for explosives to be used. He never went for dangerous high explosives, like cyclonite, which was about the most sensitive that could be accepted.

He rapidly funneled the black powder inside the slits of the safe door, tamping as he went along. He set up his primer, fuse and detonator in about five minutes.

Black powder always gave him controlled burning, and he never did find a substitute that produced a more uniform ignition. And yet, used in big enough quantities, black powder was as powerful as TNT or cyclonite itself, which had a fantastic rate of detonation, about 22,000 feet per second, he recalled.

Concentrating on his material and equipment made him forget momentarily the body under the desk and his mother back in Canarsie.

"Hey Murphy, what's taking you so long?" he heard Bramer say impatiently. "We heard you were the professor with this stuff."

"I'm ready now," Murphy replied wearily. "I've done all I had to do. It will be going off in exactly sixty seconds from now!"

They hurried out to the



corridor and Mike yanked the door closed.

"That's not really necessary," Murphy said, but his voice was muffled by a dull thud.

A small cloud of smoke lingered in the dimly-lit room. Hanging limply on one hinge, the safe door was open, its handle twisted into a strange 'U'-shape.

"There it is, Mikey, there it is," Bramer whispered in a hoarse voice. Thick wads of twenties and fifties were stacked neatly on the bottom of the safe.

"Good work, soldier," Mike said. "Not a penny singed. Bramer, let's pack it up."

Bramer pulled a large black plastic bag from his jacket and shoved the money inside with quick, jerky motions.

"Let's get out of here," he said and they hurried down the creaky, dark staircase.

Outside a cold wind blew the dust of the excavation around

the pale bulbs of the overhead scaffoldings that protected the sidewalk. They walked slowly now across the wooden planks around the corner.

"Get in the car, Murphy," Mike motioned. "We're going to see Charlie. In a half hour, it's all over."

Bramer steered the green Mercury over to the West Side Highway and took the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. Mike sat with Murphy on the back seat and pressed the muzzle into Murphy's side meaningfully as they stopped for the toll.

Wonder how long before they find the body? Murphy thought. How long before they get to Canarsie? How long before Charlie gets impatient?

He sat with compressed lips, hands resting on the seat, eyes burning, his feet taut against the floor.

"Now listen, Murphy," he heard Mike saying. "This was a clean job, no traces. No way they can connect it to us. I don't have to tell you—keep your mouth shut forever. If you talk, now or later, we'll get you. And your old lady for good measure. There's three of us, only one of you. Get it?"

"What about the guard?" Murphy asked slowly.

Bramer looked back from the front. "It was an accident. You seen plenty of people die

like that, didn't you? You keep quiet and nothing happens."

Mike put away his gun. "And besides, Murphy, you are in this as much as anyone. You're an accessory to murder, so if you're smart, you'll be all right. Be stupid and you're dead!"

The car pulled up in front of a small, yellow frame house with aluminum siding. Bramer glanced at the house number, then at a piece of paper in his hand. "Four, eighty-five Crescent, huh? This is it Murphy. You are home."

His voice was strained and Murphy saw both men watching him intently. He sensed that the next few minutes would mean the difference between life and death, and that they weren't sure what to do. They were looking for the slightest mistake, for a false move.

"What about the money?" Murphy asked.

"What about it?" Mike said carefully.

"Where's my five thousand? And while we're at it, I'm upping it to ten. The job was clean. You said it. I think I'm due a bigger cut."

Bramer's features relaxed. "Now you're talking," said Mike, nodding with cautious approval. "Let me think about it. You will get your cut in a week or so. After we see how

you're behaving. Now let's go!"

Bramer stayed at the wheel, and Murphy walked ahead, Mike following him. Murphy guessed he was safe for the moment but sensed the men were lying. There'd be no money, now or ever. He was the odd man, he knew too much. They would not kill him now; their hands would be full just to stash the money and cover their tracks. But as soon as they started figuring and thinking—It could be tomorrow or the day after, but they'd come for him. And not with five thousand dollars.

Mike knocked on the door three times. A tall, boney man with a moustache opened up.

"Okay, Charlie," Mike said quietly, "we can go."

John Murphy saw his mother by the kitchen table. Her eyes were red and she sat with her shoulders bent, fear showing in her face. Murphy saw slap marks on her cheeks and he knew she had been beaten.

"It's okay, Mom," he told her. "These men are going now. It's all over."

She lifted her eyes slowly and tried to smile. "Okay, Johnny," she whispered. "If you say so."

The door slammed shut behind Mike and Charlie. Murphy walked to the window. He saw them get in the car and

the dark green station wagon pulled away with a low purr. He looked at his watch. It was one o'clock in the morning. The trip from Manhattan took forty minutes. More or less what he expected. He knew it would be very close. He was sure of that.

What did Bramer say? "Heard around you were some special whiz kid with explosives." He was the professor, Bramer had said.

Murphy thought of the war, the three men in the car, the lifeless body of the guard. His mother's eyes were puffing up now where Charlie's fist must have slammed in. Murphy clenched his teeth. He wouldn't end up as another body shoved under a desk. He looked into the darkness, saw the station wagon turn the corner, and he thought of nitrogen-tri-iodide. NTI they had called it. An explosive more sensitive than cyclonite. So sensitive that even the weakest electric impulse could set it off. Yet it was perfectly safe in a wet state, but exploded instantly and with a ferocious shattering power when dry.

He remembered the NTI he had rolled into a wet plastic base, inside a tube of blotter paper; the tube he had pushed under the back seat of the green Mercury about forty minutes before. With a rubber band he

had attached a small electro-magnet receiver around the tube.

Now his hand quickly reached inside his side pocket. In the darkness outside, the streets were deserted, void of traffic, empty and ominous.

After a moment's hesitation he pushed the small switch on the makeshift remote transmitter he had rigged up while working on the safe. He listened for a sound he knew would soon be coming. The blotter tube had completed its job, the wetness was all gone, the NTI was dry, and the remote pulsed its message through the dark.

A sudden crashing explosion rent the silence of the night. About three blocks away a

bright orange light flickered on for a second, then disappeared like summer lightning.

His remote control was a simple radio-wave transmitter. He had no way of knowing what effective range he could control with low explosives. So he picked NTI. That would go off on the faintest of signals. He now knew he figured right.

Mrs. Murphy walked over to him uncertainly. "What was that crash, John?" she asked her son.

All along the street lights were going on, sleepy windows were being opened.

Murphy patted her shoulder. "It's all right. Whatever it was, it can't hurt you or me anymore."

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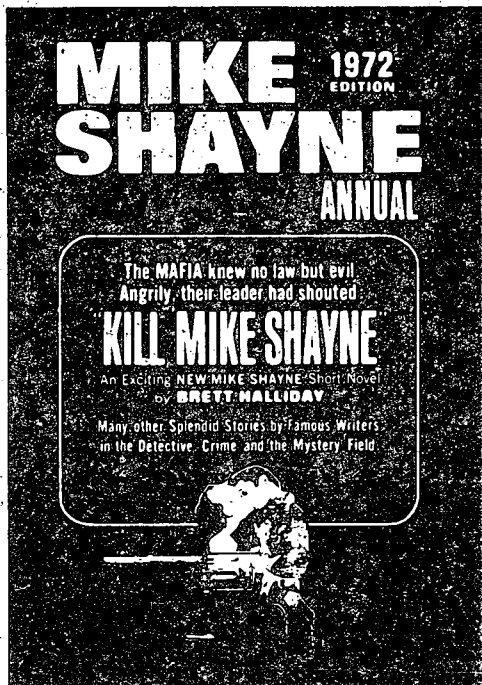
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BLUFF AT GUNPOINT

"Get your husband," the man said. He grinned evilly. "You can watch him die..."

by PETER FRIDAY



THE BABY in the next room began to cry, and Linda Mason half rose from her chair. The man with the gun stiffened and said: "Stay where you are."

She did as she was told. She sat pale and rigid, looking incredulously from the revolver to the face of the man who held it.

He could not be very old. Twenty-five, perhaps. His features were quite attractive in a way, but marred by the thin lips and the cruelty of his colorless eyes.

The baby in the next room kept on crying, at first

pettishly, then with desperate choking sobs.

"What's wrong with that brat? Is it sick or something?" the man with the gun asked. His brow was pleated with irritation, his eyelids twitching, as the child's sobbing hammered on his nerves.

"Yes," Linda Mason said, "Baby's sick."

He waved the gun towards the bedroom, and said tersely: "Go and see to it, then, for Pete's sake."

He followed her into the bedroom, and watched intently as she lifted the baby from the

cot. As she fondled and patted the child, the crying went to a whimper and presently ceased.

There was a faint sound of a car in the distance, and both Linda and the gunman reacted instantly.

But the sound died away until only the silence remained. And they both knew that it was not Jeff Mason coming home.

The baby was sleeping again. She put it back into the cot.

"What now?" she asked, trying to sound normal.

Linda felt that, as a detective's wife, this was the least anyone could expect of her—to behave in a similar emergency.

"Get back in the other room," ordered the man with the gun.

She obeyed. The initial shock of being confronted with a revolver was bad enough. This endless waiting, this feeling of complete helplessness was worse.

Only twenty minutes—twenty minutes that had seemed more like twenty years—had passed since she opened the door to find the man on the step.

"Mr. Mason in?" When he smiled he had a certain charm.

"Not yet. He may be a little late."

"How late?"

"I don't know. I'm expect-

ing him very soon, but I'm never sure when he will be delayed. When he's going to be late, he usually rings."

She did not have time to close the door against him. He stepped quickly into the hall closing the door behind him.

"I'll wait," he told her, leaning his back against the door in a queer lounging posture, insolent and challenging.

At first she just looked at him, puzzled. Then, as the smile faded from his face, she saw only the cruel mouth and the pale, unfriendly eyes.

"What do you want with my husband?" she asked.

"I'm going to kill him, Mrs. Mason," the man said.

She opened her mouth to reply, but no words came.

Now was the emergency she had sometimes visualized, but had always banished from her mind with the consoling thought that it could never really happen.

Her sister had said: "Don't you ever get nervous? I mean, buried out here in the country, just you and the baby, all alone? After all, Jeff's job does make him rather vulnerable doesn't it?"

Linda and the man stood eyeing each other. Then, backing away from him almost imperceptibly, she turned with

a sudden movement and snatched wildly at the telephone.

He was on her in a flash, wrenching the receiver from her hands and slamming it home on its cradle.

"You'd better not try that again," he said. He nodded towards the lounge, and added: "Get inside."

She walked into the lounge, the man close behind her.

"Sit down," he said, and she did so. It was then that she saw the gun in his hand.

Her eyes travelled slowly from the gun to his face. "Why should you want to kill my husband?" she asked, and her voice seemed to belong to somebody else.

"My name's Terry Hagan," he told her. "Mean anything?"

He waited for her to answer, but she remained silent.

"I had a kid brother," he said. "Paddy Hagan. We always worked together—since we were kids. We did that warehouse job. The one all the fuss was about. The cops tried to trap us on the roof. That's when we had to let them have it. My kid brother got shot. He died in the hospital."

"The one that shot him was Detective-Sergeant Jeffery Mason—your old man. Remember?"

"He was only doing his duty, wasn't he?" she said.

"He killed my kid brother," Terry Hagan insisted.

"And you killed a policeman," she told him quietly.

"That was an accident," he said. "They shot my kid brother in cold blood. But me"—he tapped his chest, giving her a twisted, proud smile—"me they didn't get, see?"

"If you kill my husband, you'll hang," she said.

The thin smile was still distorting his mouth. "They'll do it anyway, when they get me. But Jeff Mason's going first: One more don't make any difference."

All that had been twenty minutes ago. Ever since then they had just sat waiting.

Maybe she would have time to break a window or scream—anything to warn Jeff of the danger that lurked in this quiet house.

At the moment, they could only sit facing each other in the oppressive silence, their nerves as taut as stretched elastic. Suddenly the ringing of the telephone stabbed the silence, startling both of them into a nerve-straining rigidity.

Linda half rose again. He jerked the gun at her. "Stay where you are!" His face was twitching, alert, like a hunted animal's. The phone continued ringing.

"No," he said, "better

answer it. He'll think something is wrong if you don't answer." He motioned her towards the hall with the muzzle of the gun.

He was close behind her as she reached for the receiver. He placed his hand over hers. "One word out of place, and you go first, got that?"

He took his hand away. She picked up the receiver, her eyes on his face.

"Hello—Linda?"

"Yes. Jeff—Linda here. I'm sorry I took rather long answering. I—I was seeing to Anthony."

The words were pouring from her.

"Look, you know that Anthony was not feeling well this morning. He isn't any better.

"Jeff darling, I know you think I'm making unnecessary fuss over Anthony, but he *must* have a fresh bottle of medicine. The druggist will be closed now. You did pick it up at lunchtime, didn't you, Jeff?"

"Yes, it's okay, Linda. I did pick it up. I'll get home as quickly as I can."

"Please do, Jeff. 'Bye for now, dear."

She replaced the receiver, still looking at the gunman. "And now?" she asked quietly.

"We just go on waiting, he answered, and jerked his head towards the lounge.



He followed hard on her heels as they went in. They resumed their positions in the two chairs facing each other.

"No harm will come to you and the kid if you behave yourself," Hagan said.

The clock took over the conversation. The sound of it was like a steam hammer in the stifling silence.

She imagined that the first sound would be that of Jeff's car. Then she would hear his footsteps on the gravel in front of the porch. Then the slight shuffling sound of his feet on the porch, and the click of the key in the lock.

But there was none of these sounds.

The first noise—only faintly audible—was a rustle near the window in front of the house, as if somebody had shouldered a path between two of the shrubs.

She glanced at Terry Hagan, and their eyes met as if by appointment. She knew he had heard the sound, too.

And now he was on his feet, tense and watchful, the muzzle of the gun levelled at the door that led to the hall.

Linda remained seated, motionless. Her knuckles were milk-white as she gripped the arms of the chair, her lungs stretched to bursting point as she held her breath.

Suddenly finding her voice, she shrieked: "Don't come in, don't come in!"

Hagan's eyes, dark and glinting, darted towards her, but the gun pointed at the door.

The crash of glass was like a bomb explosion in the silence of the room. Terry Hagan screamed like a wounded animal as a bullet tore through his wrist.

She saw his arm jerk upwards in a swift reflex action, the gun leaping from his fingers.

"God," he said, whimpering and swaying, looking at his shattered, bloody wrist.

There was a louder crash of glass and the tearing sound of splintered wood as a heavy foot battered upon the french doors from the garden.

As the gunman made a rush towards the french doors, Jeff Mason ran in from the direction of the hall, got an arm about Hagan's neck.

"Okay, Tony," Mason said to the man in front of the french doors. "Pick up his gun.

"I confess I'm a bit curious," said Chief-Inspector Bateman at the house later to Detective-Sergeant Jeff Mason. "I mean as to how you knew there was something wrong at home."

"It was when I rang Linda. I wondered at first if I had a wrong number. Her conversation about the baby was completely cock-eyed.

"You see, in the first place the baby hasn't been sick. There hadn't been any arrangement for me to collect any medicine from the drug store.

"And she called the baby Anthony. Linda and I know only one person called Anthony. He's our closest friend—Detective-Sergeant Anthony Carter, whom I took with me when I went home. When he shoots, he never misses."

Mason grinned at his wife. "Our baby's a girl," he said. "Her name's Hope."

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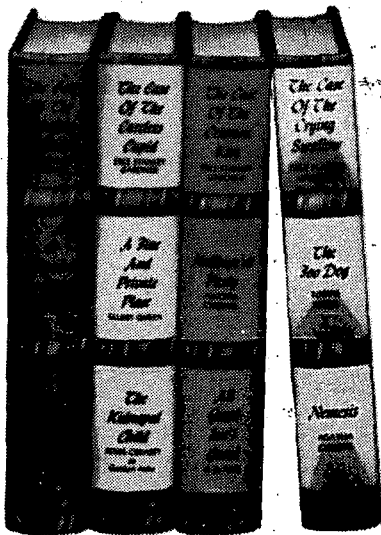
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